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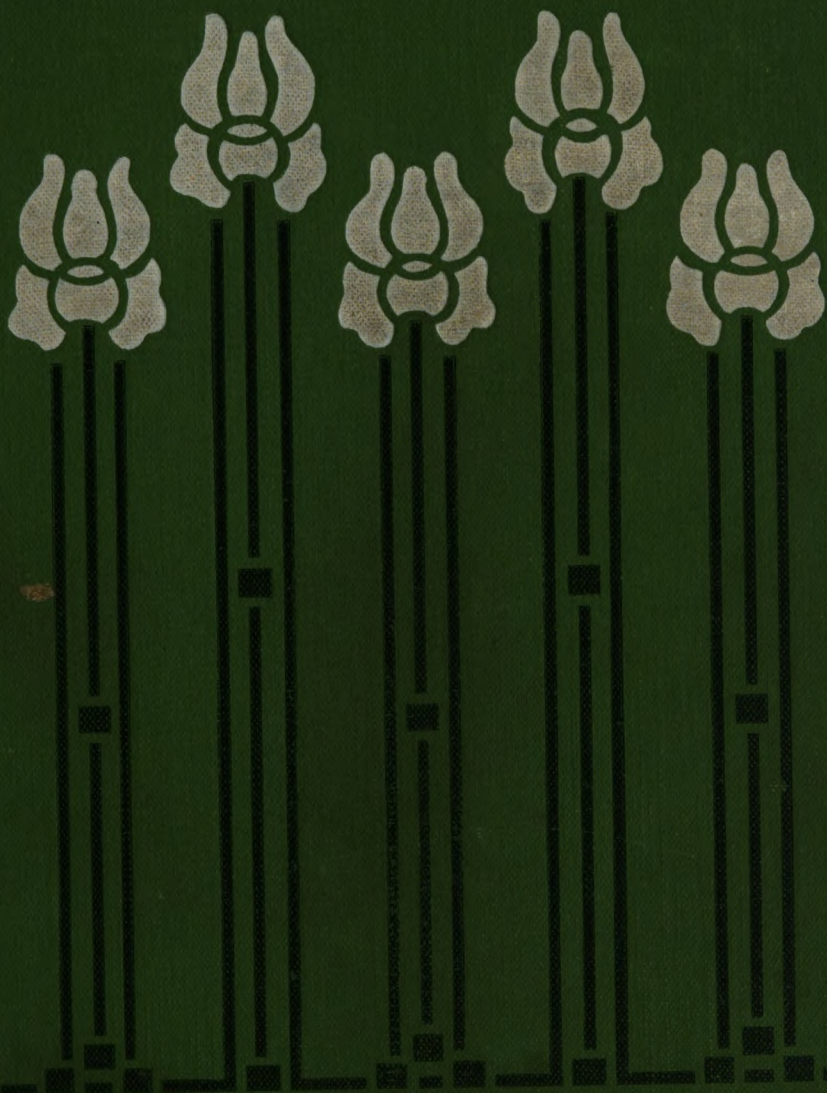
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# THE BORODINO MYSTERY



MARIA LONGWORTH STORER



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# THE BORODINO MYSTERY

BY  
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# THE BORODINO MYSTERY

## CHAPTER I

### I

**S**IR FREDERICK MARSTON reclined upon a couch in his dressing-room, which looked more like the boudoir of a fashionable lady. The wide toilet table was draped in thin white muslin over pink, the mirror was triplex; and beside the silver brushes there was a long array of toilet implements and scent-bottles, all silver-mounted.

Sir Frederick's shoulders were propped by pink silk cushions large and soft, so that he sat upright; and a crimson quilt was thrown across his recumbent legs. His body emerged from this soft covering clothed in a black velvet smoking-jacket, thrown open, disclosing pink silk pajamas, striped with a line of white.

Sir Frederick's light brown hair streaked with silver, was smoothly brushed and parted in the middle, and the grey ends of his carefully clipped moustache were waxed to a stiff point, conveying cor-



rectly the impression that the gayest days of a very gay life had been spent across the channel. He was a survival of a past generation, combining a certain Spartan stoicism — now almost extinct in the modern world — with the self-indulgent life of an epicurean sybarite.

Just now, he was under a death sentence, with only a faint chance of reprieve; but that fact itself did not bother Sir Frederick nearly so much as the necessity of talking about it to his only child, Philip, who sat beside him.

Philip Marston did not in the least resemble his father. He was tall and broad-shouldered, a very athletic Englishman, but his mobile features and sparkling blue eyes, together with his very quick wit, had come to him directly from a French mother, a most fascinating young woman belonging to a very old family — but impoverished — whose widowed mother had quite eagerly welcomed her daughter's marriage at five-and-twenty to a suitor who had so much to offer, in spite of the difference (a quarter of a century) in their ages. Unfortunately the lively French wife, whom Sir Frederick adored, died the following year, leaving him a baby son. The little boy had been an amusement to his elderly father, who never saw him often enough to be bored with his incessant chatter, or irritated by his mischief.

Philip passed successfully through the attempted

supervision of a French *bonne* and an English governess. Then came a period of jackets and Eton; followed by the coaching of a tutor. The latter had the hardest task, and was glad when his charge entered Oxford, where, on the whole, Philip did well enough as a student. He learned easily, liked reading, and had a wonderful memory. But his really remarkable talent for acting (first displayed in private theatricals) became such a passion that his wildest escapade, into which he dragged his friend Herbert Harding (known as "Bertie"), carried him across the ocean in an English dramatic Company. This happened a few months after they had both left the University. Philip Marston was the "*jeune premier*" of the troupe, and Bertie Harding was a great success in the rollicking comic roles; but the plays were too good to be appreciated by an American public clamoring for "problems." Bertie Harding's father — a retired Ambassador — and Sir Frederick Marston (who had endured this outbreak of folly, while thanking God it was no worse) rejoiced together when the short winter season was over and the Company dissolved, not having been a pecuniary success. The two prodigals had returned late in January (two months before this story begins) to their paternal roofs, and Bertie Harding was immediately sent to St. Petersburg as attaché to the British Embassy, a post which he occupied for only six weeks; his father's influence hav-

ing brought him back to London with the hope of a promotion to Paris, as second Secretary.

Philip Marston, meantime had led a quiet life, and had grown a beard much darker than his yellow hair, which he wore in a Van Dyke peak. He did this to please his father, who wanted him to cease to be a "smooth-faced mimic."

"My dear boy," said Sir Frederick, "wear any kind of whiskers you please. You may be a painter or a poet if you like, or an amateur singer. These things are fit to be the amusements of a gentleman, and I am glad you have a pretty enough talent for all of them. But a play-actor — good heavens!"

## II

Sir Frederick's eyes had been closed for half an hour, and Philip sat still, thinking him asleep.

Suddenly a wide-awake voice broke the silence.

"Light me a cigarette, will you? Your friend the doctor told me not to move if I can help it. In fact I am to be tied to this sofa until he comes to-morrow."

Philip rose and lighting from his own a cigarette taken from a silver box on a small stand, put it carefully into the very white and slender hand (adorned with several curious and costly rings) which had been one of Sir Frederick's personal vanities. His outward appearance had always pleased him. Everything about him was so nicely finished, and

so very high bred. The delicate aquiline nose could never be suspected of Semitic origin.

"I hope, sir, that Lumsden found nothing serious the matter," said Philip. "He seemed cheerful when I let him out, and said he hoped you would be all right to-morrow."

"We'll talk about that later, if you please; I told Lumsden to leave it to me."

"I hope the pain is easier, sir."

"It is *not*; but it intermits. Let that pass for the moment. I wish to take things up one at a time."

Slowly puffing his cigarette and blowing light blue rings of smoke that floated upward and melted away toward the high frescoed ceiling, Sir Frederick pursued:

"I must say, my boy, that while we have not been exactly congenial in our tastes, we have, in a way, been good friends, and, I think, have tolerated one another's weaknesses — although I have sometimes imagined that, in the course of time, you might have become rather a strict son; for underneath the gay and rippling surface, which I trace back to French atavism, I seem to discern in you a bed-rock foundation of Scottish common-sense, and even caution, which you have inherited through me but not *from* me. You have, however, allowed me my amusement at Monte Carlo; doubtless knowing that, after all, my financier's brain would master any impulse

toward reckless play, and keep me within the limit of safety."

Sir Frederick smiled a quizzical smile which lifted the stiff waxed end of his moustache on one side, disclosing teeth still white and even.

"I have not, I believe, been too strict a father, either. I have no prejudices even when things do not suit my taste. I promised when I married your mother, that my children should belong to her Church: I assured her that I should carry out my agreement before you were born. I must say, however, that I rather hoped you would be a girl."

"I trust that you have never felt that my being a Catholic has come between us, sir?"

Sir Frederick made a rather wry face:

"As far as I am concerned, my boy, tolerance has no limits whatever; a man may believe anything or nothing,—as he pleases. He has a right to his own opinion and his own way of living, be he sybarite or anchorite. Let them 'gang their ain gait,' I say; either pampering or mortifying their flesh; we must live and let live, my dear boy."

"You have always been indulgent to me in every way, sir," rejoined Philip, "and only in one thing I have missed your kind tolerance. I do not mind telling you (now that my brief career is over) that the only regret I have felt is that you have rather despised my one real talent. I tried hard to make it shine before men last winter, and I certainly made

a decided hit in one or two of my parts. I was assured of great success in the future; but I have, for your sake, given it all up—at least until you may change your mind about it. I must say that to me acting is unalloyed fun and has infinite variety, and even if you think my experiment only an ‘escapade,’ it has certainly been more harmless than the sodden amusements of many fellows of my age, who also have generous fathers.”

“No doubt, no doubt,” responded Sir Frederick, shaking the ashes from his cigarette, “but, my dear boy, one’s wild oats may be forgotten when once they are sown; and many a man has risen to fame as a statesman even while sowing them broadcast. But a craze for the stage! My dear fellow, that leads nowhere!”

Philip hung his head:

“I know what you mean, sir. Unless one can be in the very first rank, it is just a sordid *métier*, like any other —”

Sir Frederick began to look bored and tired. He threw his unfinished cigarette upon a silver tray.

“Let us get on to more serious matters, and not lose time,” he said wearily. “That episode is, I trust, past and gone forever. You are to inherit one of the most important positions, and one of the oldest estates in England. You must look your responsibilities in the face. I do not deny,” pursued Sir Frederick with a quizzical lift of one eye-

brow, "that I have been somewhat of an idler, and a bit of a dilettante myself; but that sort of existence is not *infra dig*, like the life of a strolling play-actor."

Sir Frederick shut his eyes and gritted his teeth. In spite of a determined effort to keep still, his body writhed, and his thin white hands were clenched.

"My dear Father," cried Philip Marston, struck by the sharp agony, borne so stoically. "I swear to you I will never set foot upon the stage again, even as an amateur."

Sir Frederick's eyes opened.

"Thank you," he said; "I did not mean to *exact* a promise, but it gives me joy."

Once more he writhed, clenching his white hands again, and stiffening his legs under the eider-down quilt.

"Can I do nothing for you?" inquired Philip, rising to his feet and bending over the couch.

"No, no," panted Sir Frederick. "Nothing makes any difference. It just comes and goes. It is gone already," he added with a sigh of relief and relaxing his muscles. "I must grin and bear it. Where was I? Oh, yes—first subject: the stage. We have done with that, thank Heaven. Second, your future."

"But why tire yourself now, sir?"

"You will understand why when I come to the third clause of what I have to say; so please do not

interrupt me. The pain comes suddenly, like a stab. I must take advantage of this respite, and tell you my wishes in as few words as possible. In the first place, Philip, you must settle down. I should like you to marry early — nay, don't interrupt. I have decided views and plans upon this subject, and you *must* listen to them. You do not need, as yet, to try for Parliament or official place of any kind. The government is just now bent on going to rack and ruin, and we are in the opposition. Therefore you must marry and settle down and bide your time. Study the requirements of the estates and get to know the people. Do all the things that I never have done; that is what I demand of you. And now, my dear boy, we come to the subject of your marriage. I have chosen for you —”

“Good God, sir,” interjected Philip. “You can't be in earnest!”

“You don't mean, I hope, that you have already made a choice *yourself*?” demanded Sir Frederick sharply.

“No, but —”

“Bother your buts! Don't pester me. You can make no sensible objection to my plans, if what you may call your heart is not already entangled.

“Now listen attentively, please, to the story I am going to tell. More than twenty years ago I had a dear friend, Arthur Tempest,— a charming fellow, but reckless, and always hard up. Some years later



he succeeded to the title of his bachelor uncle, Lord Scromer, who had made ducks and drakes of his own fortune, and left a heavily mortgaged estate and no ready money. Arthur himself was fond of high play at Monte Carlo, as was his foolish wife, Lady Betty,—a sweetheart of mine before either of us married. She was a daughter of old Lord Sands, a very pretty girl then, but always a fool. Eighteen years ago we spent the winter together at Monte Carlo (you were then in the nursery at home, five years old). They had with them an only child, a little girl of two, the prettiest creature I ever saw. Arthur was unusually hard up, and desperately anxious to win. He insisted upon following me. He said I was a mascot. At that time I had been trying to make out a sure system of my own; I talked intemperately about ‘breaking the bank.’ I knew better later, and even then I only singed my fingers, for I was very rich and had the caution which always makes a successful speculator.

“It was not so with poor Arthur Tempest. He came out completely ruined. Mind you, I had warned him, and the result was no fault of mine.”

“Of course not!” interjected Philip.

“All the same,” retorted Sir Frederick, “I felt in a way responsible, for the poor fellow had seemed to have such perfect faith in my lucky star. It was pitiful to see them both go away next day with that beautiful baby, bound for England. I had forced

upon Arthur a hundred pounds — which he called a loan — poor fellow. Two months later, he became (as I said before) Lord Scromer, and rusted away upon an impoverished estate, from which he scraped a bare living, and died two years afterward. He left a pitiful letter to me, apologizing about the hundred pounds, and saying that his wife would 'remember' it. From what I knew of Lady Betty Tempest (now Lady Scromer) I doubted if the debt would burden her memory unduly, and it did not. How she has managed it I do not know, but every year since her husband's death I have met Lady Scromer at Monte Carlo, and she is always among the smartest of the smart set. Rumor has it that old Sands, her father (who always lived in Paris after he ceased to be Ambassador there under the second Empire), helped her along so that she kept her head above water, by means of the widowed Duchesse de Beaulieu, an old friend of mine whom Lord Sands married in his old age; and that this same Duchess (she has always kept her French title because her French relations refused to know her as 'Lady Sands') has given them some help ever since old Sands died, although they have no claim upon her at all. It seems the Duchess (who has a large income for life, and besides owns the Château de Beaulieu in Brittany with a big estate attached to it) has become infatuated by the young girl, Lady Clare Tempest, and one can trust Lady

Scromer to make all the capital out of this that she can, even allowing her daughter to become a Papist at sixteen. Betty is a born schemer. In a lower walk of life, she would have been a successful adventuress."

"I remember," said Philip, wondering to what end all this talk was tending; "I have often heard you speak of Lady Scromer and of seeing her at Monte Carlo — but never of her daughter."

"Because she never went there during all these years, and I had forgotten her existence, until last winter (while you were in America) when Lady Clare made her first appearance at Monte Carlo. Lady Scromer had at least sense enough to keep the young girl out of the *Salles de jeu*, and she took her meals in their apartment. But one day Lady Clare came to lunch with her mother in the restaurant of the Hôtel de Paris, and I give you my word, Philip, she is a wonder! I asked Betty why they never came to England any more, and it appears that the cousin who inherited Scromer Castle pays her a small jointure, and she finds it goes farther in Paris, where they have a small apartment in the Duchess's big 'hotel' in the Rue Monsieur. Betty explained to me the whole situation, financially considered.

"'I'm going to take Clare to London for the season next year,' she said, 'but I fear it is no use at all; I never realized, when I let Clare turn Papist (to please the old Duchess who was set on it) that it

would hurt her chances for matrimony in England. But it *will*. And the worst of it is, Fred, that it won't help her in France. You see nearly all the families belonging to the Ancien Régime (the Second Empire aristocracy the Duchess considers to be mere pinchbeck) have impoverished sons who are looking out for American heiresses, and the young men of the rich bourgeoisie she of course won't look at! The Duchess has a large income but it dies with her. She is very generous to Clare, but she spends a lot on herself. What she saves, I don't know; but as to a "*dot*" that is quite out of the question. The Duchess says it would be selling Clare to some noble fortune-hunter, and she would not provide one if she could.'

"Lady Betty of course was rampant about it, as she wants a good match for her child, and she says the Duchess believes Clare's beauty should be dowry enough.

"'Good Lord, Fred,' she cried, 'imagine a young twentieth century Frenchman of high rank being lured into matrimony for a girl's *beaux yeux*! The "*dot*" is the only thing they are after. The inevitable question asked over here always about every young girl is, "How much will she have?" And the "*dot*" has got to go down — in black and white too — before ever they are *fiancés*. So what luck I shall have in the matrimonial market with my girl, either in France or England, goodness knows —

and it is awfully hard to find a rich young American over here (whose fortune I could feel sure about); and of course Clare would not have a title then: not even her own. She would be just plain "Mrs." However, as yet we simply glide along,' concluded Betty, 'and with the dear Duchess's kind help we manage to make both ends meet. I have my little fling too, at Monte Carlo, every season; and I've grown wary from experience. I usually carry off some winnings; "the burnt child dreads the fire,"—and, Lord, how we did get burnt eighteen years ago! I don't blame *you*, Fred,' pursued Betty, rolling her eyes at me, 'but it is very sad, especially for our poor girl, whom dear Arthur was so fond of.'

"I repeat to you all this, my dear boy, because it is just this tedious story of Betty's that set me thinking. I must confess to you now, that I was suffering a good deal of pain last winter—this same pain which will go away for good to-morrow, Lumsden hopes. I thought out a plan for that girl (and for you, Philip). So I want you to listen to me carefully—and don't refuse, I beg of you; for my heart is set upon it! (I really begin to think I have one)."

Philip Marston got up and stretched his legs, that were cramped with sitting still so long in one attentive position. He walked to the window, and looked out. The trees in the park on the other side of Park Lane were tossing their branches, while a

boisterous wind raced by in fitful gusts and miniature whirlwinds, bearing aloft neglected withered leaves and scraps of torn paper, mingled with oily dust from behind the procession of motor-cars. Hyde Park was at its worst. March had come in and continued like a lion and gave no promise of Spring sunshine. Inside the room, gay curtains of flowered cretonne enlivened the leaden atmosphere, and the flames from a fire flickered gay reflections in the brass bars and balls of the canopied bed.

Philip Marston felt as gloomy as the weather. His life seemed about to be nipped in the bud. He dreaded what was coming, having a premonition from what had been said already.

Sir Frederick's voice aroused him.

"It has just struck four o'clock. Let me finish at once what I have yet to say, and when my mind is at ease perhaps I shall fall asleep,— for I am getting very tired of this couch, where I must lie until tomorrow. By the way, I did not tell you; a nurse is coming — a man — at six o'clock."

It was with an anxious face that Philip sat down again to listen, but his father's countenance was placid. The pain seemed gone again for a time.

"I have had drawn up," he said, "a codicil to my will, in which I leave to Clare Tempest one hundred thousand pounds — one-tenth of your fortune, Philip — as a marriage portion; provided that she becomes your wife. It will be what in France is

called a '*séparation de biens*.' Thus will my mind be set at rest forever. The girl will have more than her father lost during all his life-time, and she will also be freed from her mother's apron-strings. That is why I make the condition of marriage, for a rich girl tied to a mother like Betty Scromer would indeed live in a hell on earth."

"Good God!" cried Philip; "I don't know Clare Tempest! She never saw me in her life. She surely would not consent to such a sordid bargain?"

Sir Frederick smiled with a twist of his mouth.

"If she is the least in the world like her own mother, my boy, she will jump at the chance!" he said.

Philip was quite beside himself. He grew melodramatic. "Father!" he cried. "You surely would not saddle me with a wife after such a fashion!"

Sir Frederick moistened his lips with his tongue, and twisted one end of his waxed moustache.

"Only get one good look at her, and I'll answer for *you*," he said. "Marry her, get her away and keep her away from Betty Scromer (her mother), and I'll wager you can do anything you like with the girl. You've not been a *jeune premier* for nothing, I should hope. Your past histrionic emotions will surely help you to make real love, in dead earnest, when the time comes."

Philip Marston temporized.

"Let us go together, sir," he urged, "to Monte Carlo. It will do you good, I am sure. You always liked to go there, and there is no need to speak of a 'codicil' or even of marriage at this moment. Let us first go and see the girl; say next week!"

Sir Frederick raised his head which had been leaning back upon the pillow while his eyes gazed at the ceiling.

"I am now coming to my third clause," he replied almost with a touch of irony. "To-morrow morning early Lumsden is coming here. The 'nurse' I spoke of is his assistant, a young doctor. He will bring everything necessary and prepare me for an operation; I refused positively to go to a hospital. Lumsden says that he can't give any definite hope of recovery; but the operation is imperative — to ease the pain and perhaps prolong life." Sir Frederick's face was pale, but his stoic fortitude held out.

"You know what it means,—an intestinal growth," he said. "After a year of such pain as I have been having, Euthanasia or Lethe or even something more final would be a relief. Will you promise me now?" he asked.

"I promise to ask Lady Clare Tempest to be my wife," murmured Philip, hoarsely.

"She'll have you, all right!" rejoined Sir Frederick, and fell asleep smiling.



## CHAPTER II

### I

**J**OHNSKEWTON, solicitor, had been for twenty years the legal adviser of Sir Frederick Marston, now deceased, and he was about to occupy the same position in respect of Sir Frederick's son and heir, Philip Marston.

He was called "old Skewton" to distinguish him from his son Tom, a rising barrister, but one could scarcely imagine that he had ever had a period of youth. He must always have been seriously inclined, but serene; one could even imagine that he had been born "old,"—a solemn baby, gazing upward with a puckered brow and an air of calculation as to the problem of life, when stretched across the knee of his earliest acquaintance, the nurse, after she had washed and dressed him for the first time. Many babies come into the world looking preternaturally wise and with a solemn self-importance, but usually this rubs off, distracted by the fascinations of a rattle, and the obsequious flattery of a fond mother, and the first enticements to lust of the eye and ear and the pride of life. With old Skewton, however, there had been no such temptations of the

flesh. Old friends of his, who could remember his mother, bore in their minds the picture of a tall, thin and very sedate lady, with absolutely no sense of humor, who could never have pranced about and "peek-a-boo-ed" even to amuse her first born. She died unostentatiously twenty-six years later, just after her son had started in his serious profession; bequeathing to him a considerable fortune, inherited from her father who had been a Chief Justice: a man of wide reputation on the bench.

It was from this grandfather that "old Skewton" derived his mental machinery. As for the boy's father, he seemed never to have been taken into account by anybody, as a progenitor. He was a sandy young man of fashion, much given over to fine raiment and social frivolity. He had worn, when his first youth was past, a curly platter-like wig (to conceal a premature baldness). It was ingeniously intertwined with two rooted locks brushed forward from a parting at the back, and forming two little russet bushes above each ear.

This matrimonial alliance had seemed impossible, but had turned out to be not ill-assorted. The solemn bride had been quite infatuated by her frivolous suitor. Her rigidity melted under the spell of that perpetual play of "Dolly dialogue" wit and fancy which made Charley Skewton so popular. As to Charley himself, the solid fortune of the Chief Justice recently deceased, had made Miss Whitridge a

very desirable *parti*. Besides, he wanted a wife who would be pleased to stay at home, and leave him free to flutter. So they were both entirely satisfied. Mrs. Charley Skewton's only trial during her married life was her husband's curly wig. She was so literal, that, when it came off at night, and was replaced by a jaunty Neapolitan silk cap with a bobbing tassel, she really became a happier wife.

"Old Skewton" could not recall a certain incident in his own biography, as it occurred before he was a year old. He had been left for a short time under the paternal guardianship of a gorgeous gentleman who propped the wise-eyed baby up on pillows in an armchair and then "boo-ed" at him. The precocious infant, destined to become "Old Skewton," after a prolonged and analytic contemplation of the face within his reach, stretched out two sudden pudgy hands and in a trice removed the wig. This was his first discovery of fraud and unveiling of truth. It almost cost him a spanking, which would have been the first and last touch of paternal chastisement, for, a week later, poor Charley Skewton was thrown from his horse and killed in Hyde Park. He was buried without the wig by his afflicted wife.

After his mother's death, Thomas Skewton felt the need of "replacing" her in the government of the small household, but, on reflection, this seemed

impossible, since he possessed not the requisite aunt, either spinster or widow.

However, after ten years of careful and cautious meditation, he chose for his bride, the fair and plump daughter of a country rector, at a pretty place in the North, where the sedate young solicitor spent his summer holidays for the purpose of trout fishing, his one recreation. He would establish in his house ("Old Skewton" calculated) a quiet and cheerful companion (no gay and frivolous gad-about) who might become the young and healthy mother of his possible offspring.

But alas, for the best-laid schemes! His young wife died when her first baby was born, leaving "Old Skewton" a resigned young widower (for he was a born bachelor) but also the appalled father of a sandy-haired and clamorous baby, a "throwback" to a previous generation; the very living image of his paternal grandfather, Charley Skewton.

To the bereaved husband's infinite relief, the rural grandparents intervened, and Thomas Winfield Skewton, named after the rector, became the delight and the torment of that worthy gentleman and his wife.

And so time went on. To the surprise and great relief of Old Skewton, his son Tom had inherited a "legal" instinct, which gave him the scent of a ferret in matters where there was any crookedness

or mystery. This mania for discovering the truth, which had impelled his father at the age of ten months to remove a deceptive wig, was a saving grace for his offspring. It tempered the vivacious and convivial emotions that clamored for a vent in the gay world, and made of Charley Skewton's image a very astute young barrister, who broke loose only at intervals into a smart society which clamored for him, throughout the London season, and especially later at house parties for innumerable week-ends. Tom Skewton was considered indispensable for games of every kind and for private theatricals, and his ghost stories were simply thrilling; one could scarcely realize that the ghosts were always second-hand. Tom seemed to *see* them, and he made his audience see them.

In his quiet and solemn way, Old Skewton was, therefore, a happy man and a contented father. In fact he did not seem "old" at all in years, being a very well-preserved gentleman of sixty odd, with gray hair, a little thin on top, and gray side-whiskers. Otherwise he was clean-shaven, with a very thin-lipped mouth, and a prominent chin, cleft in the middle. His nose was sharp at the bridge like the blade of a knife, with a slight aquiline curve, and thin nostrils. His eyes were a dark hazel and very keen, seeming never to wink. They were quite deep set, under the shadow of a high and narrow forehead, edged by a scallop of smooth grey hair.

## II

Old Skewton was seated at a large writing-table very busy. He was engaged in sorting the morning mail. From a formidable heap of professional correspondence, his detective eye at once singled out a sky-blue envelope bearing a foreign stamp (also blue), with a dishevelled and quite rampant Goddess of Liberty emblazoned upon it. The solicitor pounced upon the letter like a cock upon a butterfly. "At last," he cried; "and I wonder what is in it." The postmark proclaimed Monte Carlo.

The letter was addressed to Philip Marston, Esq., "in care" only of Thomas Skewton; but the latter pushed away all the letters belonging to himself, and leaning his elbows on the table in front of him, he held in both hands the small blue square, and stared at it as though his sharp eyes had the power of an X-ray. But the letter remained inscrutable.

"I wonder what her answer is," ejaculated old Skewton, in a state of unwonted excitement, which he accounted for by exclaiming:

"How much depends upon this girl's letter! Really, Philip is in a morbid state of mind about the whole business — in spite of all that I have said to him. Poor Sir Frederick! He was certainly not in his right mind when he dictated that codicil. I was very reluctant to write it. The thing could

have been considered waste paper, if Philip had only chosen to question it!"

As Old Skewton sat thus in mental soliloquy the door was tapped upon and opened by a clerk from the office outside, and Philip Marston entered hastily, closing it himself with a bang.

The young man had certainly changed since his father's death three weeks before. His eyes were feverishly restless, and his brown eyebrows came together in a fixed frown. His blonde and curly hair alone saved him from tragedy. Had he been dark with black locks, he would have looked quite desperate. Some allowance might be made for stage habits, and perhaps his expression outstripped his feelings. Old Skewton hoped so, at any rate.

"It has come!" he said at once, meeting the question before it had passed Philip Marston's lips and pointing to the letter.

"At last!" the young man dropped into a chair beside the writing-table, and stretched out a hand that shook.

"Come, come, Philip," remonstrated John Skewton; "don't take it so hard. It is either yes or no." Philip eyed the blue envelope as he answered:

"There is the rub! If it is yes, I marry a girl whom I have never seen, and who takes me simply for the money to which I am a mere tag!"

"Perhaps she won't say yes —" Philip frowned.

"My father said: 'If she is a bit like her own

mother, she'll jump at the chance.' What a hideous idea!"

Philip Marston had not yet picked up the letter from the edge of the table where the lawyer had laid it. He still stared at the sky-blue envelope, and an ironic smile curled one end of his brown moustache.

"Monte Carlo!" he muttered under his breath, nodding his head.

"It must have been forwarded to her from Paris," said old Skewton, "which accounts in a measure for the three weeks' delay. We thought they would have left Monte Carlo by this time."

Philip had risen to his feet, and took a quick turn up and down the spacious room, lined with book cases on one side, ponderous and legal, and with a huge safe that filled the farther end, and contained the secrets (sometimes the skeletons) of numerous ancient families.

"My dear young friend; do quiet down and read your fate. It may be no."

Philip Marston stood still and drew a long breath, between clenched teeth.

"If it is no, my father's last wish can be fulfilled only after my own death," he retorted, an angry flush upon his face. The old lawyer stood up and laid his hand on Philip's shoulder.

"My dear boy," he said kindly, "that last clause when I read it to you seemed to trouble you unduly."



"My father had not even mentioned that clause to me."

"Well, well! that proves that he considered it only a *façon de parler*," urged old Skewton. "Sir Frederick knew you were young and strong, and he just wanted to let the girl down easily (in case she refused you, which *he* did not believe to be possible). At any rate, do let us see what she *does* say."

Philip Marston could not repress a smile, in spite of the tension of the situation, when four large sheets of thin blue paper fluttered to the ground. They were covered with a frank and fearless handwriting, obviously feminine.

"She seems to have a good deal to say," remarked John Skewton, "not plain 'yes' or 'no.'"

The young man made no comment, but threw himself into a leather easy chair near the window. He read the letter slowly, and when he had finished, handed it to his legal adviser who, with his gold eyeglass settled firmly upon his nose, solemnly perused Clare Tempest's letter.

## CHAPTER III

“MONTE CARLO, Hotel de Paris, April 19th.

“*My Dear Mr. Marston:*

“Perhaps you think I have taken a long time to answer your amazing letter. In the first place it went to Paris, and it stayed in the apartment until the Duchess happened to see it. Of course she opened it (that, I may tell you, always happens to a *jeune fille's* letters); so Grand'mère (she is my step-grandmother, but I call her 'grand'mère') sent it to Mamma, and Mamma swooped down upon me, crying aloud: 'Of course, dear child, you will answer "Yes"' before ever I had seen a word of it.

“Now let me tell you, that when I was very small, Mamma could wind me round her finger. She was (and she *is*) very pretty — and then she was always crying, and saying that poor papa had been ruined and that we had not enough to keep body and soul together. It seemed funny to me, for I had too much to eat, and was dressed up so often, and my hair wound in tight knobs at night, that I hated it, and I would rather have made mud-pies in the street like the raggamuffins whom we nearly ran down in our motor-car when we drove about in London; for

we had a motor-car, and I think we were more in danger from that than from starvation.

"Perhaps you will think I am writing a very long letter (when just 'no' would be enough), but you see I have to tell you exactly what happened, and so I must explain Mamma. When I was ten years old the Duchess married Grandpapa (old Lord Sands) and that changed everything. You see, before that he had always said that he could not afford to have Mamma and me with him in Paris, where he lived on a 'beggarly pension.' So Mamma and I lived in a small flat in London. Why she did it goodness knows, but the dear old Duchess, who is very rich, and has a great big *hôtel* in the Rue Monsieur, actually married grandpapa, and she took a great fancy to me, and so she gave us (Mamma and me) a lovely apartment, down on the ground floor opening on the courtyard; and there I have lived ever since. Grandpapa died seven years ago, when I was twelve; I was not very sorry, as he was a very dry old gentleman, not amusing. I wondered always what Grand'mère could have fancied in him (she said he was a 'grand Seigneur' and he had written memoirs called 'Forty Years in Diplomacy').

"Well, after we went to live in Paris, I saw very little of Mamma, who spent the London season always in her flat, and her winters in Monte Carlo, making flying visits to Paris only in the early autumn, and late in the spring. She was in Brittany

a part of every summer at the Château with us, but she was bored to death there. Her one consolation was the economy, she said.

"During all these years, until a year ago, I have had my English governess, Miss Penfield, and *that* explains why, since I was ten, Mamma does *not* wind me round her finger. No, nor Grand'mère either, although her methods are different — being French.

"I have not time to tell you all about Miss Jane Penfield. She is a suffragette, but nobody knows it, so please say nothing about it! She used to let herself go, when she had a holiday, and spent it with two of the prominent leaders (the Spankers) under the assumed name of Tompkins! Oh, what fun it must have been. How I wish I could have been there! Of course they are all 'Militant.' Last year, Jane declares, she almost broke a big window. She had banged at it once ineffectually when she saw a big policeman coming,—and then Jane ran away so fast he could not catch her.

"Well, my dear Mr. Marston, all this long letter is to explain why I say 'no'—and I am coming to the point.

"Grand'mère is very particular about what a *jeune fille* should read, and of course I would not disobey her in *important* things; but when she drew the line sharply at Shakespeare, Jane Penfield and I put our heads together, and we decided that

Grand'mère was unreasonable, and that Shakespeare would not hurt me one bit, and it has *not*. Jane (she's twenty-five) picked out a lot of plays, and we read them at night when everybody had gone to bed; and I learned lots by heart. Most of all I love 'Romeo and Juliet.' Jane Penfield did not mind. She says that she herself is not romantic (she goes in for independence and equal rights) but she says she does not object to it in others.

"How beautiful it must be to be adored! To have anybody think there is nobody in the world like you! (I mean one's self). I know I am younger than my age, for that is twenty; but Mamma won't let me tell it, either last year nor this, when I have been with her at Monte Carlo. You see Mamma looks too young, she says, 'to have a great grown girl.' She sent away Jane Penfield a year ago because she said I had learned enough, and that she could not afford it any longer; especially as I was to be with her here at the Hôtel de Paris, where the bills are so high.

"I hope Jane is not getting into mischief. She is a dear; and she wears her hair so smooth, in bands, that you never would suspect her; but I saw in the *Times* a report of a meeting interrupted by the police in Hyde Park, where the speakers were to be Mrs. Spanker and Melpomene Spanker, 'followed by Miss Tompkins' (and I told you before,

when Jane visits them in London she calls herself 'Tompkins').

"Perhaps one reason I seem so young is that I have never 'come out.' Mamma said last year that she could not possibly afford to have me presented at Court, nor to dress me well enough to appear in Paris '*dans le monde*' with the Duchess. Grand'mère offered to do this, but Mamma said, no, she would 'try her chances' at Monte Carlo first. When I found out that this meant finding a rich husband for *me*, I registered a vow (Jane Penfield heard me; it was the night before she left), that *never* on earth should *I* be forced into a marriage for money,—be sold as a slave! When any man that Mamma smiled upon even *looked* at me this last winter, I was so fierce that they all desisted at once. Your father is the only man I talked to one day in the garden after lunch, when Mamma was busy inside, as she is all day when we are here. I hope you won't mind my telling you that I thought him a very worldly old gentleman, although he took my hand and held it (we were sitting on a bench), and was very kind, but he would talk of my getting married, and marrying what he called 'well.' He was a great friend of Mamma's long ago—I think a suitor.

"Well, your letter came two weeks ago, as I said in the beginning, and Mamma read it first and then

swooped down upon me. 'Here's an Arabian Night's vision!' she cried. I read it. You know how short and to the point it was. 'It sounds like a slave-market,' I said. Well, then we had one of our 'scenes.' I won't describe it, but the upshot was that I have been for two days writing this letter whenever I am alone, and Mamma, whenever she sees me, has been clamoring for a short note, *which she will take charge of*, saying: 'Yes, thank you!'

"Oh, I know it is hard on Mamma, because she is poor, and I would give anything to put a mine of Golconda at her feet (she does love money so!) but sell myself to get it—*never!* Oh, how could you ask me? I ought not to feel angry with you, perhaps, for you say that you are executing the last wishes of your father! But, goodness gracious! It seems even worse to know that you don't *want* me! What answer *could* you expect? Are not you glad, after all, that I am a fool, and not a *knave?*

"So, Mr. Marston, my answer is, 'No'—as big a NO as I can write; and I wish to say further, that I never want to set eyes upon you. If you have any kind of consideration you must see that, after what I told you about Mamma, I could not stand it for a day. I give you fair warning, that if you should ever set foot here, I shall run away at once, to Grand'mère, who is still in Paris. She gave me a lot of money to spend here (not in the 'Salles,'

of course; I never go there), and I should not be in the least afraid to go alone.

"After all, what a fool I am to say all this, for you have nothing to lose. In fact you will be richer than ever, and well rid of a ridiculous marriage. Your note certainly did not sound like that of an ardent suitor! I shall not soon forget it.

"Yours sincerely, CLARE TEMPEST."

"Piqued," John Skewton remarked, as he laid down the letter. Philip Marston, who had walked to the open window, turned about.

"I should think she might be!"

"One would think you sympathised with *her!*" cried old Skewton, wheeling around on his chair.

"Why, hang it all, it *is* an outrage. There is no use mincing words. Here is a beautiful girl—"

"Oh! You did not tell me you had seen her—"

"I never did; my father saw her last winter. He said if I got one good look at her, he would answer for me."

"Indeed," said old Skewton solemnly. "Then why not have gone to see the young lady and taken 'a good look'?"

"You and I went all over that ground three weeks ago," rejoined Philip testily, "and decided that I should write a plain statement of the facts."

"One hundred thousand pounds—"

"Great Heavens!" cried Philip—"that is just



the point. It is a great fortune; they need it — she and her mother. My father considered it, justly or unjustly to himself, to be a reparation. The mother ‘swoops’ upon her to insist upon this abominable marriage — and this splendid girl throws back at me the whole infamous bargain that is tied to the money —”

“Tut, tut,” said old Skewton, “don’t be tragic! The fat is not in the fire yet a while. Go down to Monte Carlo and see the girl.”

“This passes!” Philip Marston seized his hat and stick, and rushed to the door. He turned about in the doorway.

“Mr. Skewton, I am sorry if I seem to be rude, but this is to me a most serious business. You know that my father and I never hit it off very well, our tastes were so different —”

“He was in a way the gayer of the two, but he did not like your play-acting,” interjected old Skewton.

“The truth is that we never seemed to have the natural or congenial relationship of father and son. But don’t you understand that, for this very reason, his sudden death is a great shock to me, and his one last wish more imperative?”

Philip had come back into the room as he spoke, leaving the door open. “I can’t fulfil that first condition; I never can explain the letter I wrote or

make amends. It would be an insult now ever to see her face."

Philip Marston almost slammed the door as he went out, and on the stairs he nearly tumbled over Tom Skewton, coming up.

"Helloa!" exclaimed the rising barrister.

Philip muttered something indistinct, and went on down-stairs.

"Got his answer?" Tom asked as he entered his father's room.

"It is *no* —"

Tom whistled. "He is to have all that money himself then, and it is really his by right (Sir Frederick was daft about that codicil), and he is not to be saddled with a fortune-hunting girl and her impossible mother (I've seen Lady Scromer) and, behold, I meet him on the stairs looking like the fifth act of a tragedy — how do you account for it?"

"I think," answered old Skewton, "that Philip Marston is not in his right mind."

"I think he is stark staring mad — and he comes by it legitimately. I've been looking up the family history of the Tempests, father, and there is not a shred of proof that Sir Frederick ever enticed his friend into any ruinous gambling. On the contrary, Tempest, *père*, and Lady Betty, were absolutely reckless at play, and brought down every misfortune on their own heads. Sir Frederick, although he *was*

such a *bon vivant*, was a very kind man, and no doubt he got this crochet into his head when he was ill, and thought the marriage also a good plan for Philip. You know he always was rather frightened over the romantic susceptibility of his son and heir, and apprehensive of some very pretty and ineligious daughter-in-law; and I fancy he wanted to arrange an appropriate *mariage de convenance*, making two attractive young people happy into the bargain."

"The girl is attractive? You have seen her?"

"My eye! Did not I see her, sir? When I was in Paris four weeks ago, inquiring about the Tempests and looking after some other business, I beheld a vision of beauty seated beside a stout and fair old lady, turning the corner of the Rue de Rivoli into the Place de la Concorde. A French friend who was with me said: 'That is the old Duchess, "Lady Sands," and her husband's granddaughter, Lady Clare Tempest. Pity she has no *dot*.' I thought I told you, sir."

"Maybe you did," old Skewton looked bored; "but it is not a matter of any interest to me whether the girl is pretty or not. She has said *no* very distinctly any way."

"Letter must have been amusing?" insinuated Tom, grinning.

"It did not amuse the recipient," responded old Skewton grimly, "and its contents are a matter confidential and private."

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "I am not prying into it. The upshot is not confidential at any rate."

"I'm worried about Philip Marston." Old Skewton shook his head ominously.

"He always was a crank," interposed his son, "very emotional and absurdly romantic — old-fashioned; doted on Scott's novels; knew his poems by heart — spouted Shakespeare at school when he was sixteen. That is why Philip was so keen about acting, and made such a stir last year in America. He's a genius in his way, but cracked, as geniuses always are."

"It is abnormal, the whole thing!" grumbled old Skewton — "and I should not wonder if there is more to come."

"Nor I, either," assented his son; "it is a farce that may turn into a tragedy."

## CHAPTER IV

**T**WO young men were seated in the dining-room of the Savoy Hotel. The table was laid for three. These two had entered at the same time, and their appearance had attracted the attention of many of the diners already seated, exciting especially the curiosity and admiration of the fair ladies present, some of whom had even turned about to follow them with approving glances.

Both of the young men were tall and broad-shouldered; one was emphatically a "foreigner." His yellow hair was brushed straight on end, and his golden beard, parted at the chin, floated on either side like wings that a breeze might lift. It was a real "*barbe d'or*" such as Cherbuliez loves to dwell upon in describing some hero of romance.

This unusual looking person was Prince Borodino, Bertie Harding's Russian friend. His companion was Philip Marston. Although not so completely the ideal hero of a sentimental French novel of a generation ago, Philip Marston had also an unusual as well as a handsome outward semblance. He found favor everywhere, in the eyes of an appreciative female world, young and eager after emotions. He had always tried to escape from flatter-

ing observation by an assumed air of unconsciousness.

"Philip was handsomer without his beard," remarked one pretty girl at a neighboring table. "He grew it to please his father when he came back from that absurd acting escapade. Now Sir Frederick is dead, let us hope Philip will take it off. It is a pity to hide such a handsome mouth and chin, and I don't like that red-brown beard with his yellow hair."

"I wonder," said a young man sitting beside her, "who that wonderful chap can be who is with Philip. *He* has got a regular golden fleece of a beard."

"I never saw any one so *foreign!*" the girl rejoined. "He looks as if he had stepped out of a French story-book."

There were eight diners at this long table; one of them turned his head as the girl spoke, and looked at the two young men.

"I'll wager," he said, "that the *foreign* youth is Prince Serge Borodino, the Russian friend that Bertie Harding put up at the Club to-day."

"What about him?" cried the others in chorus.

"According to Bertie Harding, this Russian friend of his is a splendid fellow. He told me all about him at the Club this afternoon. Bertie says he knew him in Paris when Bertie's father was Ambassador. He says Borodino and his mother lived

there in retirement. There was a tragic mystery hovering about them; she never went out in society, and could only be seen driving in the Bois; a beautiful creature in black. Bertie says she died there a short time since, and no one found out the mystery in Paris. But Bertie (who is so proud of ferreting things out, especially diplomatic secrets), says *he* discovered it all in Petersburg. He says Borodino's father (that is not his real name) was a nobleman of high rank, who turned socialist and was implicated in a plot to upset the Czar. All the estates were confiscated, and he was sent to Siberia and died before he got there. That accounts for Borodino's poor mother, broken-hearted in Paris. Bertie says she had a large fortune in her own right; and since her death, the question has come up whether that estate should be Prince Borodino's by inheritance. It ought not to have been forfeited. I think from what Bertie said that Prince Borodino's visit to London has something to do with this claim against the Russian government."

"Dear me, how exciting!" cried the pretty girl. "What do you think of it, Tom?"

Her neighbor was Tom Skewton. Her name was Cynthia Hay.

"I think," said that rising barrister, "that the foreign young man looks too mysterious and too much like a hero in fiction—and the story itself sounds fictitious."

"You men are always jealous of each other, Tom," rejoined Cynthia Hay, with a shrug. "*You* could not grow such a poetic beard if you tried."

"I shan't try," said Tom; "besides, you said you did not like Philip Marston's."

"That is different," responded the girl, and glanced again toward the next table. "They are expecting somebody—the table is set for three. Bertie Harding must be coming."

"I am expecting another person," said Philip Marston at the same moment to the head-waiter, to whom he gave the order for dinner. But Bertie Harding, who evidently was to be the other guest, did not appear; and after waiting half an hour the other two began their dinner. Five minutes later, a despatch was brought to the table. Philip Marston read it, and passed it on to the Prince. It was short.

"Very sorry, but can't come; hope to see you tomorrow."

The two young men seemed more amused than disappointed.

"Who is she?" they asked simultaneously, loud enough to be heard at the neighboring tables; and laughing heartily at their own jest. This laugh of Philip Marston's was remembered afterward. Every one who heard it declared that he had seemed to be in high spirits.

As the young men rose from the table Philip



Marston said: "Let us look up Bertie after the opera and find out all about it. Why, helloa, Tom!" observing Tom Skewton, whose table they were passing. "You are making up for the toil of the day, I see; and Cynthia is here too, of course!" then stooping forward, as Prince Borodino passed on ahead, Philip whispered to Tom:

"I don't want to talk shop now; but that is Prince Serge Borodino, a friend of Bertie Harding, and I mean to take him to see your father to-morrow. We may want your advice, too. It is a question of an estate in Russia, wrongfully confiscated. I mean to help the Prince financially for Bertie's sake; I promised. It will take my mind off all these recent worries. Good night."

Tom Skewton and Cynthia Hay recalled to each other these incidents two weeks later.

## CHAPTER V

### I

**O**LD SKEWTON sat in his offices the next morning. He was awaiting, in a state of perturbation, the visit announced to him an hour before by his son Tom, who had dropped in as usual on his way to his own Chambers in the near neighborhood.

Tom Skewton had told his father about the meeting with Philip Marston the night before at the Savoy, and of the "queer-looking Russian fellow with a yellow beard" with whom Philip had been dining.

"He said he was going to bring this friend of his, with a very unconvincing name (Bertie Harding even admits it is assumed),—Prince Serge Borodino—to see you this morning.

"Really, sir," Tom pursued, "I am afraid that Marston is going to be victimized in some 'wild-cat' scheme, as they say in the States,—for which he is to put up the money. I thought you would better be on your guard, so I dropped in to give you a word of warning. This foreigner has been thrust upon Marston by Bertie Harding; and while I am sure

Bertie is quite honest and square by nature and training, it is a matter of common gossip that his fondness for champagne suppers is getting really serious, and may nip his diplomatic career in the bud. It has passed the line of safety which he himself marked out ('In medio tutissimus *bibis*'), and I really fear that Bertie is growing irresponsible and easily duped. As to Marston, you agree with me that he is quite off his head."

Old Skewton's usual *sang froid* was disturbed by his son's warning, so that his nerves were on edge in irritable expectation when the outer bell rang punctually at eleven. He started to his feet in unwonted agitation, as the door of his private sanctum opened admitting Bertie Harding and a blond young stranger, both a prey to most abnormal excitement, which manifested itself in their gait and their dress. The young men had their hats on, Bertie's a bowler, and the Prince's a very new and shiny top hat, and Bertie staggered rather than walked across the room to where old Skewton stood waiting.

"This is Prince Serge Borodino," he burst forth jerkily as an introduction. The Russian gentleman brought his heels together with an accompanying bow, and then put out his right hand on which were two large rings, an old intaglio on the third finger, and a gold seal with armorial bearings beside it on the little finger. Old Skewton caught a glimpse of them, and also felt them when the stranger's hand,

which was hot and trembling slightly, grasped his own.

"How un-English!" murmured the old solicitor internally. The Prince took off his hat (as though suddenly conscious of the omission), revealing very thick yellow hair brushed upward and inclined to crinkle, but stiffened by much *brillantine* and standing straight on end. His eyes were blue, their light and color subdued by round glasses tinted pale yellow and set in a gold frame, which pinched the bridge of his nose, and from which depended a rather wide black silk ribbon, fluttering airily across a youthful yellow beard, and hiding itself in an upward curve, where the end of a variegated oriental-looking scarf appeared to view beneath the "golden fleece," as Tom Skewton had called it. The Prince was dressed in a light grey tweed suit, a mixture of British and foreign. The material was the former but the closer fit moulding itself to the broad shoulders was continental. Bertie Harding, in light cinnamon brown, with falling shoulders, was the ideal portrayed on a British fashion-plate,—an admirable advertisement of Poole—down to his tanned leather shoes, and including his walking-stick. The Prince's low black shoes with pointed toes and rather high heels were as distinctly Parisian, revealing silk hose, blue and white striped. From the breast pocket of his coat emerged the corner of a white silk handkerchief, blue edged. His cane was

black with a handle of old Japanese carved ivory, representing a slender bunch of curved reeds, with numerous small frogs in low relief, climbing up and around them.

"Be seated, please," said Old Skewton, glancing, uneasily, from one young man to the other, "and tell me what is wrong! Where is Philip Marston?"

"That is just the question—the awful question!" ejaculated Bertie Harding, throwing himself into a low, leather chair and burying his purple face in his hands. The old lawyer had noticed that this face looked much the worse for wear, probably from hard drinking over night. Bertie still wore his bowler hat, and his head shook from side to side. Prince Borodino bit his lips and cast an impatient glance at his companion. Unlike the latter, he was pale and his features unperturbed; but the veins at his temples stood out like blue whipcord. He controlled himself with an obvious effort.

"Perhaps," he said, in a remarkably agreeable voice, with a slight foreign accent, pleasant to the ear, "perhaps it would be best for *me* to explain —"

"Yes, do!" exclaimed Bertie, raising his head. "You were the last person to see poor Philip alive!" Old Skewton was struck speechless by these ominous words. Prince Borodino, one long leg crossed over the other, and his left hand resting lightly on the rim of the top hat, while he made gestures with his ringed right hand, told his tale.

"Last night Mr. Philip Marston and I dined at the Savoy."

"My son saw you," murmured the lawyer, in a voice which he hardly recognized as his own.

"We had expected our friend here," pursued the Russian, "but he sent word at the last moment that he could not come."

Bertie's mottled face almost blushed as he mumbled:

"Dined somewhere else — had forgotten previous engagement."

"Mr. Marston and I dropped in for an hour or two at the opera in Covent Garden, after which we went to a Music Hall and had a late supper, and then we decided to look up Harding and see if he had come home. This was after midnight. We found him, in fact, at his chambers."

The Prince seemed unable to repress a smile, not suited (as old Skewton noticed) to the tragic occasion.

"He was lying in his evening clothes on the bed. He had dismissed his valet, it appears, early in the afternoon; giving him leave to go out to Clapham and spend the night there at his mother's."

"I *expected*," muttered Bertie, shamefaced, "to dine at the Savoy with you fellows (and quietly, so as to talk business afterwards), and then came this supper that I'd forgotten. I had only just come back, shortly before one o'clock, when they came in;

otherwise I should have been undressed all right, and in bed." This apologetic explanation was addressed to old Skewton, who, remembering what his son had told him, looked his disgust. "Probably drunk" was in his mind; but he said aloud:

"What happened then?"

"We remained about half an hour with our friend. Then Mr. Marston (who, of course, as you know, was almost a stranger to me) said: 'I must be going home; I am not used to such late hours, and for a month I have been dreadfully worried over my father's death and some other things.' So we agreed that we should all three meet the next morning (to-day) at eleven, at the club, and come here to consult you, Mr. Skewton; and Mr. Marston wrote the engagement on a card and slipped it into the frame of the mirror of a shaving-stand, in case Mr. Harding should have forgotten about it this morning."

"I had *not*," said Bertie in an aggrieved tone. "I got up bright and early, remembering it distinctly."

"Mr. Marston and I then walked to the Embankment and lingered a while in the moonlight near the obelisk, watching the river and the lights. He had seemed very depressed at intervals during all the evening, between moments of rather boisterous gaiety. Now he turned upon me quite suddenly. 'Prince Borodino,' he said, 'most people, I believe,

would be happier dead than alive! I mean, that their death would be a gain to others, and small loss to themselves. That is the way I have been feeling lately. Aside from a few sharp emotions, life seems to me of late to be infinite boredom,—a sequence of forlorn platitudes. Our social world here in London is a realm of blind banality — where the one-eyed are Kings!’

“I knew that Mr. Marston had been on the stage. In fact I saw him once in Chicago last winter, when I made a flying tour of only a month to distract my mind. I found Marston really remarkable; quite Protean in the variety of his parts, but best in romantic melodrama or romantic comedy.”

“*Please* go on!” cried old Skewton impatiently.

“*I am*,” responded the Prince. “I only wish to explain why I took this speech last night to be half earnest and half stage-play,—or even a mere quotation. This is my excuse for complying with Mr. Marston’s request made a moment later; that I take a taxi back to my hotel, and leave him to saunter slowly home on foot to his house in Park Lane. I assure you, Mr. Skewton, I had no misgivings.”

“Of what?”

“Suicide!”

“Good God!” ejaculated old Skewton, pale as death and clutching the arms of his chair with a grip that turned his knuckles white.

“It is true,” groaned Bertie Harding, “and in



Heaven's name, let us try to keep it out of the papers until the poor boy's body is found." He took a telegram from his pocket-book. "To show his premeditation (how he had thought it all out beforehand), look at *this*"; and Bertie Harding passed the paper over to the horrified lawyer, who settled his eye-glass on his nose and read, in French: "I can't stand life any longer. When my body is found give me Christian burial. My coat and hat you will find hidden in a bush to the right of the obelisk. This will tell you where and how it happened."

"When did you get this telegram?"

"When I was at breakfast this morning. It was sent at ten o'clock last night from the Savoy, the young woman operator remembers; and Prince Borodino says that poor Philip told him to wait a moment while he sent a wire. The young woman knows no French. Of course Philip wished, if possible, to avoid having any one outside read the message. He wrote it down very distinctly in capital letters, and with no signature. I saw the original, and it has been transmitted with only three mistakes in spelling."

"What have you done?"

"I telephoned the Prince; called for him at his hotel and we drove to the Savoy, with the result that I have mentioned. Then we went past the obelisk and stopped our motor. Sure enough; the light

overcoat and opera hat were wedged in between the thick branches, and behind the leaves of a bush near the parapet. We recognized the coat at once. The bundle is down-stairs in the motor. It has taken us barely an hour." Bertie Harding's face twitched, and each sentence was wrung from his lips in a spasmodic staccato.

When he had finished he covered his face again. His shoulders shook. Prince Borodino remained impassive. He had taken his cane from between his knees, and was busy contemplating the climbing Japanese frogs carved on the ivory handle, through his yellow glasses. Old Skewton leaned his elbows on the table, and shaded his eyes with both hands. His head spun round in sheer bewilderment. It had all been so sudden.

## II

In the silence which succeeded the last words of Bertie Harding, concerning Philip Marston's overcoat and hat, a scuffle was audible in the outer office, and the door of old Skewton's sanctum was suddenly thrown open by an excited and elderly but most respectable looking man, with a junior clerk clinging to his coat tail and exclaiming in broken accents,—

"I say, I say — you can't go in now! I tell you Mr. Skewton is busy. You *must* wait outside!"

"I won't wait outside, nor anywhere else!" the

elderly man exploded, as he burst into the room; and the routed clerk, retreating, shut the door.

Old Skewton's indignation fell as he recognized Sir Frederick's old valet, whom Philip Marston had taken for his own. As to the valet, he suddenly straightened himself, pulled right a rumpled tie, and hat in hand made a polite but agitated apology.

"I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Skewton and gentlemen. I don't want to seem rude, but Oh dear!" and he stopped to blow his nose, which needed it, upon a red bandanna handkerchief. "I'm that worried, that I hardly know what to do nor where to begin! My master, Mr. Philip Marston—" the old servant stopped short, becoming aware of Bertie Harding: "Oh, Mr. Harding, sir, can *you* tell me where he is? He went to dine with you, sir, yesterday evening,—he told me so,—at the Savoy, sir, and with a strange gentleman, who left a card on him yesterday — *this* gentleman —" holding out a card on which was engraved: "Prince Serge Borodino."

"That is my name," said the Prince. "I remember you came to the door when I called yesterday."

"The butler was out, sir, and Mr. Philip let the two footmen go after Sir Frederick's death. He has been acting queer ever since, and when he did not come back last night, it gave me such a fright, sir,—me and 'Awkins, the butler —"

"That is quite natural, Foley," said old Skewton kindly. "We are all of us worried."

Foley came nearer; "And do you think I ought to be giving you this, sir?" he said in a low voice, taking from his pocket a sealed envelope.

"What is it?"

"It is Mr. Philip's last will and testament, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Because me and 'Awkins witnessed it yesterday, sir, and he said so. Our names is signed to it all right. And Mr. Philip told me if he did not come home last night to take it to Mr. Skewton's offices between eleven and twelve to-day." Foley burst into tears, and again had recourse to the bandanna handkerchief.

Old Skewton turned the long envelope over and over, looking first at the seal and then at the address, in Philip Marston's handwriting. The two young men sat still, eying him intently. Foley backed respectfully to the door, and left the room, without noise.

Presently the solicitor raised his head, and said in a matter-of-fact and professional manner:

"Gentlemen, I see no reason at all why I should not speak openly to you, after what has occurred, in regard to some of Mr. Philip Marston's recent dispositions and his plans for the future. Professional reticence no longer holds me, since it will soon be a

matter of public notoriety. I have been very much worried (I need not disguise it now) ever since Sir Frederick Marston's death, over his son's condition. He was in a state of neurasthenic excitement over that codicil. I may as well admit at once that I consider Sir Frederick's bequest to that young lady — and the previous requirements — so fantastic, that I told Philip frankly, that he could easily invalidate that codicil on the ground that his father was of unsound mind. But Philip Marston refused. He reminded me of what was very true, that Sir Frederick had led the kind of life that puts death in a dim background; and that when such a man is brought up suddenly, face to face with the end of all things, for him, he hastens to put his house in order. Philip reminded me also of his father's great generosity and kindness to friends in trouble; especially the undeserving. I have no doubt," old Skewton raised his eyes and looked at each of the young men alternately (they were growing restless), "that the great beauty of this girl and Lady Betty's wheedling influenced Sir Frederick to make such a really preposterous provision.

"This is a long preamble, I know, but I wish to neglect no detail. Now to the facts. Philip Marston came to my house near Guildford in his motor late in the afternoon, the day after receiving his answer from Lady Clare Tempest. He insisted upon setting aside a portion of the estate left him by his

father, of the value of one hundred thousand pounds, to be conveyed to Lady Clare Tempest on her twenty-first birthday, as an offset to Sir Frederick's bequest in the codicil. 'Supposing she won't accept it?' I asked; 'I will trust to her mother's persuasion,' he answered. 'Lady Scromer is always hard up; and then I have no doubt that the old French Duchess will do all that a Frenchwoman can do to induce an extremely romantic girl to see what common-sense in our gilded world demands.' I must say that Philip Marston struck me on that day (last Saturday) as being in a much saner frame of mind, although cynical as to *women*. He seemed to be committing this (to me unnecessary) act of generosity, rather — if I may say so — contemptuously; as though he thought that Lady Clare would get off of her romantic high horse, and descend into the matrimonial arena under the guidance of her English Mamma and the French adopted Grand'mère. In fact," admitted old Skewton, "those were poor Philip's own words. I, myself, would not have used such expressions. 'This rids me of the horrid feeling,' he said, 'that people are eagerly waiting for my death, and it effectually carries out my father's wishes as to what he considered to be a reparation.'"

"She is a stunning girl!" commented Bertie Harding, eying significantly Prince Borodino, whose head was sunk upon his breast, and who

seemed to be meditating upon what he had heard.

"Now, as to this will!" Old Skewton held up the envelope, "I confess I am puzzled. Poor Philip told me he would come here next week, and have it drawn up. He said he supposed he ought to make one — and I urged him not to delay, because a man in his position, having a large fortune and no near relations, would certainly not intend to die intestate (I may mention, gentlemen, that Sir Frederick's enormous estates were not entailed, except the old house in the country, his father having made an immense fortune by speculation), and the very last people that Sir Frederick would have wished to see inherit his possessions would be his son's next of kin, the French relations on the mother's side. In fact, I should not wonder if some eager invitations — which Philip had not accepted — sent on his coming of age by a French aunt, with what she herself frankly described as two marriageable daughters, were not at the bottom of Sir Frederick's plan with regard to Lady Clare. I think Sir Frederick Marston had (I won't say from experience!) a decided prejudice against French wives in English families!"

"When do you propose to open this will?" asked Bertie Harding. Old Skewton, who had been wondering why the young men did not take themselves off (their tragic mission being ended), and who had

been telling his prolix tale partly to refresh his own memory, replied quite tartly:

"I shall read the contents of this envelope as soon as I am alone; certainly not before."

The two young men sprang to their feet simultaneously. The solicitor got up from his chair, apologetically.

"Please do not think me rude," he said; "I am really much upset by this terrible affair. I was very fond of Philip — knew him as a boy — and I have always believed that when he had got tired of his ridiculous fad for play-acting, he would turn out a brilliant and useful member of society,— perhaps a leading statesman — although his being a Romanist (another unfortunate circumstance connected with his French mother) would have been against him in a public career. However, all this is over now (old Skewton blew his nose). If this be, as Foley says, a last will and testament drawn up by the testator himself, I shall read it as soon as possible, to the beneficiaries, after which we shall await results."

"You mean the estate will be administered at once?" Bertie Harding's dull eyes were eager.

"Not at all," rejoined the solicitor; "I mean that until Philip Marston's death is clearly proven, by the finding of his body or some convincing proof of his decease, nothing can be done; and his heirs, whoever they may be, will have to wait patiently —"



"Do you mean to say," cried Bertie, in obvious excitement, "that no money will be forthcoming —?"

"Not until satisfactory proof of death, or the lapse of seven years," rejoined old Skewton with finality, and in a tone which seemed to say "What the devil is that to you?"

Prince Borodino muttered something that sounded like an oath behind his golden beard. Bertie Harding intervened.

"You must excuse my friend, dear Mr. Skewton. He was expecting a loan of two thousand pounds, and, now, apparently, everything is to be tied up indefinitely."

"Certainly!" Old Skewton showed satisfaction in his tone.

"And this deed of gift to Lady Clare Tempest?" Bertie Harding assumed an air of idle curiosity.

"Oh, that is all finished and done with; signed and sealed yesterday morning, and put away in my safe to await her coming of age. Poor Philip being now dead, the young woman would have come into her fortune all the same, under Sir Frederick's codicil. But now the deed of gift takes its place. She will be notified at once, and she will enter into possession on her twenty-first birthday."

When he was alone old Skewton understood Bertie Harding's eager curiosity. The document inside the sealed envelope was a short will written the very

day before by Philip Marston himself, in which he divided the whole of his large estate equally between his "dear friends" Herbert Harding and Henry Lumsden. This will was witnessed by Thomas Foley and William Hawkins.

"Humph!" said old Skewton. "Harding seems to be cognizant of this. I wonder why Philip told him; and I wonder still more why Philip should have killed himself just when he seemed to be growing saner, and to have fixed everything about that girl in a way to satisfy the most morbid and abnormal notions of right and justice.

"Poor fellow; he seemed to me to be quite on the highroad to recovery when he drove out, only three days ago, to arrange that deed of gift. I felt completely reassured about his future, especially when he told me he had sworn to his dying father that he would never go on the stage again; so that foolery was well over." Old Skewton shed a furtive tear. He really felt very sorry.

### III

It is easy to say: "Keep it out of the newspapers." It is not so easily done.

Before two days had passed, there appeared a sensational heading:

"Mysterious disappearance," not mentioning Philip Marston by name; and a week later: "Romantic suicide." An account of the codicil to Sir

Frederick Marston's last will and testament followed, and a short biography of his son Philip, speaking of Philip Marston's brilliant intellect and erratic life, especially his appearance on the stage as a "star" for a brief period in New York and Chicago. All the details already given were repeated as to the abrupt ending of his own life "in a fit of mental aberration"; concluding: "The body has not been found; and probably never will be, owing to the stormy weather and strong tide; and also to the fact that no serious search was made and no reward offered for several days, in an ill-advised effort on the part of Mr. Marston's friends to hush up the whole affair."

As to Clare Tempest, she was inconsolable.

"I would have said 'yes' if I had known he was like that!" she cried, in tears.

Lady Betty was triumphant.

"Only *think!*" she cried. "You would have got the money in any event!"

"That is the bitterest drop of all!" retorted Clare. "He actually believed that I would have taken it as a *gift* next year, if he had been alive!"

"So you would, darling," asserted her mother. "I am sure Grand'mère and I would have persuaded you to do it, for our sakes!"

"How *can* you say that?"

"Never mind, darling; he *is* dead, all right, and

the money is yours on your very next birthday, in ten short months!"

For the first time in her life Lady Scromer admitted joyfully her daughter's age.

"Then we shall see how all the desirable young men on *both* sides of the Channel will sit up!"

"I shall *never* marry!" protested Clare.

"Yes, I dare say," rejoined her mother soothingly. She would humor Clare for a time. There was nothing to be done this year, at any rate; nothing before the birthday ten months hence. So the immediate plan for a presentation at Court and a rather "scrimpy" season in London, in a small furnished flat, came to an abrupt ending. It had been made as a forlorn hope. Next year there would be a triumphal entry, with "freedom of the City of London!"

So Lady Betty resigned herself to going straight from Monte Carlo to Brittany. She and Clare even forestalled the Duchess, who was "making a cure" for her rheumatism at Pougues-les-Eaux.

## CHAPTER VI

**T**OM SKEWTON and Cynthia Hay had known one another from early childhood. The Honorable Lionel Hay and John Skewton had been school-mates, and their friendship was lifelong. They both were widowers at an early period in their respective lives; old Skewton was left with his one son, Tom, of tender years, and Sir Lionel Hay with the harder task of bringing up two daughters. He had been fairly successful, as he was very rich, and preferred his big country place, Brampton Hall near Guildford, at all seasons of the year; so his girls grew up healthy country girls, without any city taint.

Old Skewton's chief pleasure in life and only relaxation from his business was to spend a long holiday at Brampton Hall during the summer and frequent week-ends all the year round. It followed that Tom Skewton and Cynthia Hay had really been playmates all their lives. The elder sister, Gladys, was four years older than Cynthia, and boasted always of her superior wisdom. At this time Gladys Hay had been married for five years to young Viscount Bolton, grandson of the Duke of Windermere, and was the very proud mother of two little boys, the elder aged four years, the younger two.

From youthful rough-and-tumble games Cynthia Hay and Tom Skewton had passed on to more skilful or intelligent amusements shared in common,—riding, tennis, billiards, and even chess, which game Tom cultivated as being a promoter of keen foresight, swift execution and wary self-defence. Tom and Cynthia had played together for so many years that after they were grown up (Tom was now twenty-five and Cynthia twenty) they were in great demand, at house parties of their friends, concocting charades and practical jokes together, or easy private theatricals. Tom always tried his ghost stories on Cynthia before attempting to curdle the blood of an entire assembly after nightfall.

During the past year, Tom Skewton had, as we have already mentioned, taken up and encouraged in himself, what he considered to be a keen scent for detective mysteries; and a talent for unraveling them. Several legal cases which had come to the young barrister had been connected with rather unusual crimes and misdemeanors in high life, and had whetted his appetite as an amateur detective. Of course all these excitements had been shared by Cynthia, as scarcely a week passed either in or out of London without their seeing each other.

Their first meeting after the dinner at the Savoy took place two weeks later,—an unusual lapse of time; and of course the one subject of conversation was Philip Marston.

"Do you remember," said Tom, "when he stopped to speak to me that night and we both decided that he seemed in high spirits?"

"Perfectly," answered Cynthia. They were sitting on a wide terrace outside the dining-room at Brampton Hall after dinner, while old Skewton and Sir Lionel were smoking in the library. The night was cool. Tom, whose cigar had gone out, got up from his garden chair, and paced up and down in growing excitement over his subject. The stars were beginning to shine bright and a little moon was sinking behind the Surrey hills. It was early in May; the weather slightly chilly, but spring-like, and the flower-beds below the terrace were gay with tulips of many shapes and varied tints, just now fading, indistinct and ghostly, to a mottled goblin grey, — a group of shadowy forms shaken by a light breeze.

"Are you warm enough?" asked Tom, in a rather more than brotherly tone.

Cynthia drew a white scarf closer about her shoulders. "If I shuddered it was not with cold," she answered. "The night air feels creepy and I seem to see things. Go on!"

"I was just saying that after getting together all the evidence and going over it carefully, with some rectifications of my own, there can be, in my judgment, only one conclusion."

"What is it?" Cynthia's voice sounded hollow.

Tom stooped low and replied almost under his breath,

"Foul play!"

"Oh, dear!" Cynthia leant back in the cushioned chair and looked up at Tom, who stood beside her:

"Have you told your father?" she asked.

"On *no* account! He is the very last person to be told a word about it until I can have the case made out complete or perhaps not until I lay hands on the guilty *persons*. I must get all the threads together, one clue after the other, before I can *act!*"

"Oh, Tom!" cried Cynthia, "let *me* help! We have got up so many things together, theatricals and ghost stories; and this is the most exciting game we ever played."

"It is dead earnest this time!" he rejoined with a tightening of his lips.

"You are really serious, Tom?" she asked. "I thought it might be only a joke."

"My dear Cynthia," said Tom Skewton, "the ghastliest things in real life sometimes have the air and atmosphere of an extravaganza. Some of the tragedies of high life assume a burlesque air up to the fifth act; especially the French *dramas de famille*. Take this case, for instance, and let me map it out briefly in my 'professional manner,' as you call it. We have here, first of all, an elderly father who makes a fool of a will when he is *really*



dying. Then comes into the drama his son; an eccentric, excitable young fellow, with an extraordinary talent for acting. He gets completely upset by his father's sudden death and the condition made beforehand about Clare Tempest, etc. Next, we come to the girl's refusal of his offer. Philip Marston was pretty nearly off his head the day he ran over me on the stairs, coming out from seeing my father. I told you all about it. But," and Tom Skewton shook his extinct cigar impressively, "from that first stage of neurasthenic excitement to a premeditated suicide, there is more than one step! And yet the whole suicide theory is based upon that. Therefore, I determined that foul play (skilfully planned) was more likely."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"The very last man who saw Philip Marston alive,—that so-called Prince Serge Borodino!"

"That unusual-looking Russian?"

"Russian or Patagonian; nobody knows what he is!"

"But, Tom, Bertie Harding says he knows all about him."

Tom Skewton sat down in the vacant chair next to Cynthia.

"That is the worst feature of the whole business," he whispered, bending toward her, and gazing intently into her frightened eyes.

"Oh, Tom! Do you mean to implicate Bertie as an accomplice?" Tom breathed hard.

"I can't get away from it: not with the evidence I have got so far; nor, I believe, with what I am going to get."

"Why, Tom, you yourself (and it came out at the investigation) told me that Philip Marston wrote a telegram in French to Bertie Harding, telling him what he meant to do and where to find his coat, and all that. You said at the time that it was a perfectly crazy thing to do, and an absolute proof of his insanity."

"I have now reason to believe," said Tom Skewton impressively, "that Philip Marston never wrote that telegram at all; that it was written by the Russian fellow!"

"But the handwriting?"

"There was no handwriting about it! That fact aroused my very first suspicion. *That telegram was in plain capital letters and in French!*"

"Yes; but, Tom," persisted Cynthia, still remonstrant, "I remember it was said in the newspapers that poor Philip did this in order to make the letters easy to read, and that he wrote the despatch in a foreign language so that the Telegraph clerks would not understand it. Besides, did not the Savoy young woman herself testify that the young gentleman who gave it to her was tall with a *brown* beard?"

"That, my dear Cynthia, is the clue that I followed to-day. I went to the Savoy and cross-questioned that young woman. Her evidence is not worth a straw. She contradicted it flatly to-day."

"How?"

"Well, she seems to be a suffragette, militant. She flew into quite a rage at my first words. She is pretty, but no longer young. She said that all this badgering made her tired, and gets on her nerves. She does not remember whether she said 'yellow' beard or 'brown'; and she asserted with asperity that she has got other things to think of than the hundreds of men that come and go at the Savoy with or without beards. 'What do they take me for? Do they think I've got my eye on every young man that comes in here? Why, very often I never look at them at all; I just read the wire and tell them how much to pay.' The upshot is that the young woman declares, and will swear, that she only meant to say that a tall young man in evening clothes, *with a beard*, gave her the message that night, and she only noticed that much because he was so tall. 'As to his beard being yellow or brown, I never noticed, and I don't care a snap of my finger,' she concluded."

"Then you think it really was Prince Borodino who gave her that message?" asked Cynthia.

"It is certainly a plausible theory, especially when put together with a piece of information which I gathered this afternoon, on my way to the train."

"Tell me!" Cynthia shivered, gazing upward at Tom's face which looked ghostly in the dusk.

"I will," said Tom, "and, remember, this is just as far as I have gone, and we can come to no evidence such as I could present to my father as conclusive until the whole mystery is carefully unravelled, thread by thread. It takes a legal (I may say masculine) mind to bring the facts together logically, but I do not underrate the advantage of feminine instinct, as an adjunct!" Tom smiled upon Cynthia.

"But about Bertie Harding?"

Tom Skewton grew very grave.

"There is no doubt," he declared, "that a man who leads the life Bertie Harding leads, and drinks as much as he has since his return from Petersburg (where I have no doubt he got into bad habits) is a potential criminal. The piece of evidence that I got this afternoon points very distinctly that way. This is it!" Tom Skewton threw away his cigar and relapsed into the garden chair. Drawing it nearer to Cynthia, he continued: "There is a night watchman employed on special duty about the big building where Bertie Harding has his flat. Bertie lives on the third floor, and the lift stops running (the boy goes to bed) at midnight. Now, I made this watchman's acquaintance to-day. He is an oldish person, seemingly devoid of curiosity, and communicative when adroitly approached. His special duty,

according to his own account, is to prowl about and smell if there is anything burning, the building being old and not fire-proof. His interests are not human. 'Bless you,' he said, 'there a'nt never been a thief around here; a place where there is only single gents, not so very well off — and no ladies with jools. I don't notice people; I've no call to. There a'nt no suspicious characters about our building, and only the gents that live here or their friends come in or out when I'm watchman. I don't go on dooty until midnight; 12 to 8 is my time!'

" 'Perhaps you can remember whether Mr. Harding, No. 26, third floor, came home two weeks ago (Tuesday night), after midnight: whether you saw him, I mean.'

" The watchman shook his head.

" "'Is valet sits up for 'im at such times; and 'e keeps the lift runnin' 'imself, so as to take the gent up comfortable. The lift boy always goes 'ome at twelve.'

" I looked intently at the watchman's fishy eyes and mottled face. 'Look here,' I said, taking a guinea from my pocket, 'it will be worth this to you to remember about that *Tuesday* night. Did you notice two tall gentlemen going up-stairs?' A light kindled in the watchman's eye. 'I did,' he replied, 'two tall gentlemen with beards. I don't know wot floor they went to.' 'Did you see them come down?' 'I seen one of 'em come down 'arf an

hour later. 'E was alone. I never seen the other one.' 'But did you recognize the "other one" when he went up?' I insisted.

"The watchman thought a moment. 'I mind seein' 'im onst,' he said, 'about a month ago; a tall gent with a peaked brown beard. That night 'e brought Mr. 'Arding 'ome. I don't know the gent's name. They're nothin' to me, any of 'em.' I gave the night-watchman his guinea. That is all!"

"But good gracious, Tom!" gasped Cynthia. "Do you mean to say that Philip Marston went with Prince Borodino to Bertie Harding's rooms at one o'clock that night, and that Prince Borodino came away *alone*?"

"That is just what I do mean to say."

"And the story Bertie Harding told, and Prince Borodino's story about walking to the embankment —"

"All fiction. Nobody but myself thought of questioning the truth of their tales."

"But what about the coat and hat found in the bush near the obelisk!"

"You have now touched upon the subject of my next investigation," responded Tom Skewton. "How did the coat and hat of Philip Marston get there?"

"But, Tom!" protested Cynthia. "How about Philip Marston's will? Did you not say that it seemed to be an additional proof of suicide?"

"With what we know *now*," replied Tom Skewton impressively, "there is reason to believe that Philip Marston's will is a clever forgery."

"And the witnesses — Foley and Hawkins?"

"Bribed to sign the document and to lie about it afterwards!"

"My dear Tom, that seems incredible."

"My dear Cynthia," Tom Skewton remonstrated, "nothing is *incredible*? That is what makes Criminology so fascinating a study, especially for a lawyer. It is a modern science. Its professors were at first too hasty in classifying crime. Lombroso, who took the lead some years ago, has ceased to be considered infallible. He measured skulls and evolved a special *criminal class*; a race apart. Lombroso was succeeded by men who pinned their logic to atavism. They almost wiped out individual responsibility. The most recent, and, to me, most plausible theory, is, that Mankind is made up of pretty much the same ingredients, harmless by themselves or when properly balanced, but dangerous in certain combinations, and (like powder magazines) liable to explode under certain provocative circumstances. That is what I call *chemical* psychology. Most people are potential criminals!"

Cynthia shook her head. "I don't understand," she objected, "how crimes can be called chemical products or why you have such a poor opinion of human nature."

"I will try to explain my meaning," said Tom, assuming what Cynthia called his "legal manner."

"Take, for instance, Bertie Harding. No one denies that he is personally attractive, and apparently of a harmless type. He is good-natured, easy-going and extremely amusing. But on the other hand, we are bound to admit that Bertie has recently taken to hard drinking, and that he is of an excitable (I might say inflammable) temperament. Alcoholism, my dear Cynthia, is at the bottom of most of the crimes in the calendar. It is the flame which sets off terrific explosions from usually harmless ingredients. It creates fiends out of inoffensive human beings. Every lawyer is familiar with such cases. Neither you, nor I, nor the man himself, would believe him to be capable of such a crime a week earlier. In Bertie Harding's case, there is, besides, an external, diabolic influence. It is the old story of an evil genius?"

"You mean that horrid Russian, Tom?"

Tom Skewton nodded his head with compressed lips.

"I took his measure at a first glance," said Cynthia, wisely. "Do you remember the Prince that night at the Savoy? Did you notice his back and the way he walked on ahead with his nose in the air when poor Philip Marston stopped at our table? It all comes back to me now, Tom."

Tom Skewton smiled indulgently.



"That," he said, "is a woman's method of putting two and two together. However, I do not underrate the value of feminine instinct."

Tom Skewton rose to his feet and drew a long breath.

"For serious detective work, my dear Cynthia, a man must depend upon careful analysis of details and a logical deduction from the facts. That is what makes the fascination of such cases to a legal mind. It is the unravelling of a mystery by scientific methods; not a mere man-hunt.

"I mean to put everything else aside and give myself, body and mind, to the solution of this problem."

It was late that night before Cynthia Hay could sleep. Horror held her; but beyond that was the fascination of finding out the truth. It was like living one's self in a thrilling detective story. Poor Bertie; she hated to think so ill of him; but he never had seemed to have any strength of will, and he was hard up and drank recklessly. An astute villain might do almost anything with Bertie. Tom was right about that.

## CHAPTER VII

**S**INCE the advent of motor-cars, Brittany is not so remote from Paris, nor is it so primitive and simple as it was twenty years ago: but the beauty of the coast of Finisterre is permanent, and the Bay of Douarnenez is unchanged since the time, long ago, when it completely turned the head of young Jules Breton upon his first visit; so that he says he could not paint at all that summer, because it was too perfect to be imitated.

This story is not written, however, to describe the beauties of Brittany nor its well-known hostelrys and churches so admirably depicted by those who can do it better. Such literary padding, moreover, is always skipped, no matter how well done, if the events of the story be exciting, and this is a tale of excitement.

Let it suffice to say that the old château of the Duchess was near Quimper that it was roomy and slightly frowsy inside, like all old French châteaux which are unspoiled by modern upholstery and conveniences, and that it had in exchange for the lack of "*confort moderne*" the peace and quiet of past ages and generations, for even the French Revolution never penetrated so far.

At the back of the garden, behind the château, was an old forest, dark and dense, a thicket of ancient oaks. Their gnarled trunks might have dated back to the time of the Druids, and round bunches of mistletoe sprouted here and there upon their hoary branches. A little path wound through the brushwood and undergrowth, and at the foot of the thickest stemmed and most ancient oak was a wooden bench a good deal the worse for wear. Here Clare Tempest loved to sit, and here she and Jane Penfield had been wont to retire, reading Shakespeare and some forbidden romances aloud to one another during five romantic summers.

• • • • •  
Ten days had elapsed since the death of Philip Marston. Lady Scromer sat yawning over a novel. She was ensconced in a soft and downy armchair, and she was dressed in a white frock, thin and lace-trimmed, which clung close to a willowy form of which she was inordinately proud. Time had not in any way stiffened its elasticity, and she kept up the old poses of her "Betty Sands" period, when she had always had a habit of flinging her legs and arms about gracefully but unusually, in the style of Watts, R. A., and of Burne-Jones. The lapse of twenty years had not been equally kind to Lady Scromer's face. It was etched with many fine wrinkles along the brow and about the eyes, which cold cream and pearl powder could soften but not efface.

The lids of her dark blue eyes (Betty Sands' strong point) were reddened with minute granulations, but Lady Scromer still rolled these orbs with fine effect — by electric light — at Monte Carlo — where she was always very gay. Take her altogether, however, Lady Scromer was, unquestionably, well preserved and carried her forty-two years very airily indeed.

Clare Tempest, in appearance, was the apotheosis of her mother. Wherever the youthful Betty Sands had been imperfect, *she* was beyond criticism. Her grace was spontaneous and unaffected. Lady Scromer used to say:

“Clare is the image of me at her age!”

On this particular morning Clare had come in from the Druid oak forest — a tall, white figure — with the face of a Galatea just awakening to life; innocent of guile, and full of tremulous expectation. Even the tragic end of Philip Marston seemed to have ceased to cast a shadow upon it, although with her mother she still maintained the air of a blighted being.

“What have you been doing out there so long?” questioned Lady Betty.

“Reading,— reading Shakespeare,” answered Clare.

“Don't let the Duchess catch you at it when *she* comes.”

“Oh, Grand'mère does not mind *now*,” rejoined

Clare. "She said when I should be twenty I could read what I pleased whether I was married or not. I *am* twenty, and I shall never marry!"

"For goodness' sake, Clare, don't harp upon that one string any longer. You positively get on my nerves. Besides, you will change your tune, young lady (or I am mistaken) some day. By the way, two letters came this morning, one from the Duchess saying the doctor has commanded her to remain another two weeks at Pougues-les-eaux; the other," Lady Scromer looked portentous, "is from Herbert Harding (you remember 'Bertie' Harding in London long ago?). He says that he is going as second Secretary to Paris in a week or two, and that, in spite of the fortune his friend Philip Marston left to him, which he can't touch until the decease is proved, he means to work hard in his diplomatic career now and get to be an Ambassador just as fast as may be. I should not wonder," Lady Scromer eyed her daughter warily, "I should not wonder if Bertie Harding became a great catch if he goes on rapidly (when he gets to be first Secretary in Paris he may be made an ambassador somewhere). Lots of girls would jump at the chance to be Ambassadors after a few years in Paris, without trailing about the world first as Secretaries' wives — and having babies in outlandish places!"

Clare burst out laughing; the first time since her self-imposed mourning had begun.

"Go on!" she said. "If it amuses you, you may pick out a bevy of variegated suitors, French or English, white or brown! only I warn you, Mamma, my invariable answer shall be 'No'—"

"There is another possibility also," rejoined her mother not heeding her. "I have not done yet with Bertie's letter. It appears that he has a young Russian friend whose claim to a large estate in Russian Poland has just been happily settled. Wait a minute,—let me read what he says." Raising a gold lorgnon to her eyes, Lady Scromer read aloud:

"I want to present to you a young friend of mine, who is going to Brittany on a motor tour by himself. He is an eccentric genius, but really charming. His name is Prince Borodino; at least that is his rank but not his name (in fact the "o" at the end makes it distinctly un-Russian): His father got into trouble in Russia, but never mind that now!" Lady Scromer raised her eyes; "All that sounds queer, but when I read the rest, you will see that it does not really matter." Returning to the letter she continued: "The poor chap, when he was sixteen, was taken away from Russia to Paris by his mother (they had to leave). I saw him often there when my father was Ambassador and we studied French one whole winter in Paris, and we were very fond of each other—about eighteen, both of us. Music, poetry, languages,—he seemed to know every-

thing,— besides riding and fencing like a mediæval cavalier.

“ ‘ Well, his mother’s estate was also confiscated (for his father’s offenses). He thought this illegal, and, after her death (only a few months ago), Borodino wrote to me that he wanted to bring the matter at once before the courts, and get a decision. He said he had friends who would be glad to attend to it, but it required at least a thousand pounds, and neither he nor his mother had been able to afford to risk it. In fact, they did not have the money. He was in Paris when he wrote, and I thought at once of our poor friend, Philip Marston. This was just after Sir Frederick’s death. I spoke to Philip about advancing the money, and he said that, on my recommendation, he would consider it and would talk it over with me and with Borodino. Poor chap! The Prince came to London two weeks ago, and he and Philip Marston dined at the Savoy. I was not able to go myself (I was not very fit that night).

“ ‘ You know what happened on that fatal night, but you don’t know this detail: that only an hour or two before he killed himself, poor Philip came to my rooms with Borodino and told me that it was all right; that he would advance the money. After all was over, and our poor friend’s will was read, giving Lumsden and myself his great fortune, of course I was only too glad to help Borodino myself. (The amount is two thousand pounds.) I managed to

raise the money on my prospects. The fool Court is waiting for "proof of decease," before Lumsden and I can inherit. Borodino's suit has gone through like magic in Russia. The Prince got a despatch in Paris a day or two ago saying that he has been awarded the whole of his mother's Estate, which the Russian Government had seized when it confiscated his father's. It is a matter of about a million sterling. There is one condition: that he never shall resume his father's name. So he remains, "Prince Serge Borodino." He expects to go in about a month to Warsaw, and meantime he is seeking rest and recreation in Brittany. I know that you and your charming daughter, whom I have not seen for so long, will like him. Remember me to our mutual Monte Carlo friends.'

"Well, what do you think of *that*?" asked Lady Scromer putting down the letter, and waving one slim white arm with a Delsartean willowy vagueness.

"Do you mean to say, Mamma, that this extraordinary personage is coming here?"

"Why, of course he is! Weren't you listening? 'He is going to Brittany on a motor tour alone.' Bertie says; and he writes also that he wishes to present the Prince to us. Have you any objection?" her voice was acrid.

"No objection whatever!" rejoined Clare. "I am quite curious to see such a phenomenon."

Her memory of poor Philip Marston, whom she



had never seen, began to grow still dimmer. Life throbbed with new interest, even excitement. Clare wondered what Jane Penfield would think of a Russian Prince named "Serge Borodino!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### I

**T**HE very next morning, Prince Borodino made his first call at the Château de Beaulieu and was ushered into the garden where the two ladies were seated. As a chronological fact, it was on the evening of this same day that the conversation of Tom Skewton and Cynthia Hay took place upon the terrace at Brampton Hall (which the reader doubtless remembers, but which the Prince knew nothing about). He was serene, high-bred, and perfectly cool; rather forcing the season by wearing white flannels, but no sea-breeze blew and the air was still and sweet with the breath of spring; as the Morbihan and Finisterre always may be, between the pauses of the rain, after the March storms are over. The bushes of blossoming broom (the *planta genista* of the Plantagenets) flashed golden flames (like beacons of welcome, the Prince thought) on the high banks of the rather narrow lane that led from the public road to the château, and beyond the closely trimmed lawn and the symmetrical garden (laid out by Lenôtre in the time of Madame de Sévigné) the same yellow torches quivered in the sun against a dense background of shadowy blue green, the forest

of stunted but primeval oaks known as "the Druid grove."

The Prince sat facing in this direction, but his eyes were busy with the two figures in his foreground. The beauty of the younger lady had dazzled him. It affronted the searching sunlight, which disclosed not one single flaw. Clare Tempest loved sunlight, and her parasol was held loosely upon her shoulder, flaring behind her golden head in a wide halo of creamy pongee. Her mother was more warily attired: her face only dimly suggested, her form frankly displayed. Lady Scromer's wide black gauze hat drooped a little in front, and was swathed in an ample veil of white silk muslin which spread its two ends behind her head, embraced her neck,—and was tied in front with a loose knot just below the chin.

In this voluminous silken setting, Lady Scromer's face, in the soft shadow, with invisible touches of powder, now pink, now white, in their proper places, looked really flower-like; and the faint resemblance to Clare appeared more striking than usual, to the mother's advantage. One has seen the same effect often in two flowers on one stem; one, earlier blown, a little the worse for wind and weather; the other just opening to the fresh dew and sunshine of life.

Prince Borodino was keenly alive to all these lights and shades. What a whole page describes, he took in at a glance. Clare noticed (and of course

her mother also) what fine blue eyes — and very clever ones — were set quite deep under the Prince's rather thick blond eyebrows; for his yellow-tinted eye-glass hung idle from its shiny black ribbon. The thick tan gloves and heavy coat of a chauffeur (Bertie had said the Prince was "driving himself") had been left on a table in the great hall, stone-paved, which took up the entire front of the main building of the château, as did the long salon at the back where three glass doors (double) opened on the level of the lawn and garden. The dining-room was in the great round tower, the oldest part of the château, as old but not so big as Amboise on the Loire.

I am passing over most of the conversation at this first visit, because it was only the usual talk of well-bred people meeting for the first time, with an under-current of unexpressed but eager curiosity, especially on Prince Borodino's part. He was already devising plans for his campaign. His small talk was so many little outposts placed warily behind trees and bushes to spy out the lay of the land. He discoursed lightly of Monte Carlo (with which he appeared to have had a passing acquaintance), and Lady Scromer "rose" at once to the occasion. In three minutes Prince Borodino was aware of what she did there and why she went. When Lady Scromer branched off to the "chances" of a mother with "a big grown girl" finding an eligible suitor, "because you know, Prince Borodino, that whether a girl has a fortune

or not the question is equally important," Clare Tempest grew so restive that the visitor adroitly changed the subject. He was rewarded by a look of thanks, and an awakening bloom of excitement, when he talked about the plays which were really worth seeing (that he would really like *her* to see) in London.

"You know there is hardly a thing that I can go to in Paris,— that Grand'mère will take me to!" the young girl complained.

"Grand'mère is rather too strict," explained Lady Scromer, surveying the pointed toe of a slender slipper, encasing a very diaphanous silk stocking which in its turn clung close as a serpent's skin about a shapely ankle. "You know, Prince, 'Grand'mère' is only my step-mother. I call her '*Belle-mère*'; but she came too late for *me* to be brought up in the way I should go (she married my father, Lord Sands, after *I* was a widow). I can't say I am sorry!" "Lady Betty" (her old friends always called her by her "born" name) leant back in her low wicker chair, with her hands clasped behind her head, and the loose white lace sleeves falling back from her fair arms. One slim leg (which members, when they were left to the imagination used to be known as "limbs") was carelessly crossed over the other. "*I* am not sorry!" She laughed, looking up at the young man.

Prince Borodino understood. He had taken "Lady Betty's" measure, and he really felt pity for her daughter,—so different, so well worth winning even aside from the fortune. However, the Prince was very glad indeed — *very* glad — (for personal reasons) that Clare Tempest was going to possess riches of her own.

"If you would be so kind as to permit me,—I mean if you would like," he was speaking to both ladies, but his blue eyes were fixed on Clare; "I am going to be here for some time. I love Brittany, and Quimper will be my headquarters. Perhaps you would allow me to read one or two of these plays to you. Even without the stage they are very amusing, and I think I may say (for my dear mother used to tell me so) that I read aloud well: also in English." The Prince spoke with some hesitation. His pale cheeks, where the "golden fleece" did not conceal them, even blushed slightly. Lady Betty answered for both:

"We shall be delighted," she cried. "It is *so* dull here; in fact I am hoping to run away myself for a month when the Duchess comes. That will be in about two weeks. So please begin soon. We can have the reading in the morning, and you will take luncheon with us. And afterwards," she added with another beaming glance, "perhaps sometimes you would take us for a spin in your car. You see I

have already noticed what a beauty it is;— too fine for a ‘man alone.’ ”

Clare Tempest’s glance almost rebuked her mother.

After the overjoyed visitor, who had not had the faintest hope of such signal success for a first call, had departed, Lady Scromer fairly shouted: “*Is not he a dear?* ”

“Mamma, we don’t know him!”

“Not know him! Why Bertie Harding has told us all about him. And he has just come into an immense estate in Russia!”

“But we don’t know *him!*” persisted Clare. “We don’t know what sort of a man he may be, although I admit he is very handsome.”

“What more do you want to know?” asked her mother, springing lightly from the chair and waving her closed parasol in a graceful Indian club exercise. “Come now, Clare! What do you really think of the Prince, yourself? Be frank! You often boast of your blunt truthfulness as though it were a special virtue of your own!”

“I think,” rejoined Clare, looking a little down upon her mother from a superior height — she had risen, and still held her parasol resting on one shoulder — “that Prince Borodino is very clever and very agreeable. He would, I think, be handsomer without his beard.”

“That wonderful golden disk! It is like an up-

side-down halo! It is a cloud of glory." Lady Betty seemed to sketch it in the air with the point of her parasol.

"Ugh!" said the girl. "I don't like beards!"

"But your grandfather, Lord Sands —"

"Grandpapa's was white. They are all right *then*. It is young men with beards that I do not admire. Fancy Romeo with a beard!"

"Good Lord, Clare! When are you going to stop being Juliet?"

"Never, I hope, if you mean 'romantic.'"

"It will end in a 'fifteenth century frenzy.' You will make a fool of yourself."

"I don't care if I do!" retorted Clare with gleaming eyes. "I should not mind a bit being that sort of a fool! Not a promiscuous modern fool, delighting in flirtations and banalities."

"You will come to your senses, child. You *must*, for when you come into your fortune and are your own mistress, you will have to keep a wary eye in your head for adventurers. Many an ardent swain will try to persuade you that it is your face and not your fortune —"

"I can tell you one thing, Mamma," interrupted Clare; "if I ever *should* marry, it will be because I am loved for *myself*. You know I refused to be *bought* (though I wish now that I had said 'yes' to poor Philip Marston!). You cannot suppose then that I shall accept a man who wants to sell him-



self? I wonder —” Clare’s tone changed with her subject, “how Prince Borodino would look without his beard; and with his hair fixed,— I don’t like that straight up brush, either!”

“Perhaps you will ask him to shave it all off, and to part his hair in the middle and slick it down.” Her mother’s tone was acrid.

“Never in the middle — on one side. Perhaps I shall, when I know him better. We have taken the first step toward a quite sufficient intimacy!”

“Shall I forbid the readings?”

“Oh dear, no;”—this time the girl’s voice was very decided.

## II

Evidently Prince Borodino’s first appearance had been a brilliant success all round. He gloated over it himself; he was single-minded. It had not for an instant crossed his brain that Lady Scromer’s personal estimate of her charms was so great that it might go the length of imagining the complete subjugation of a rich suitor more than a dozen years her junior.

During a half score of seasons at Monte Carlo Lady Betty had kept her eyes open for something “eligible,” but when found among the class of British and American aristocratic or democratic millionaires (whose only object in going to the Temple of Fortune is amusement) these sybarites

looked askance at the allurements of the wily widow. Those of her own rank and race freely admitted her companionship, both because of Lady Betty's birth and her marriage, so that socially she was of course at the very top of the "smart set." There was nothing off-color about Lady Scromer. Both the English and French aristocracy freely admitted this. But when it came to little hints on her part as to "*establishment*," the widowers and mature bachelors of British high rank and wealth changed the subject, with an indulgent smile: saying,

"Betty is no end of fun, you know. But one must keep one's eyes open. She's lookin' round for a soft place to settle in. Betty *thinks* she could be a helpmeet to a public man — God help him!"

One or two very rich Americans had also proved "inabordable" (to use the expression of some amused French spectators who were, of course, "ineligible"). These astute new-world men of business enjoyed very much a familiar social intercourse with a fair member of the British aristocracy (for them the very highest circle to be attained in a climbing world). But in their eyes also (when hints were thrown out about a "home" at Newport or on Fifth Avenue), there came a look of wary self-defense; and they said among themselves: "Who wants to saddle himself with a widow (even well-born and with a title) *and* a child?" The answer was invariable. At Monte Carlo Lady Scromer be-

came known to the smart set as "The wily widow." Last year she had even laid siege in dead earnest to Sir Frederick Marston, bringing up reminiscences of a romantic past; "first love" and all that. At one time, she almost thought he would surrender. To tell the truth, poor Sir Frederick, beginning to be conscious of his very short lease of life, did, for a brief moment think of yielding, and "establishing" Lady Betty as a Dowager in the big town house that Philip detested. Consideration for the latter, however, burdened with such a skittish step-mamma, prevailed, and after seeing Clare Tempest, Sir Frederick hit upon the other plan. It seemed to solve all the problems of the situation. The girl appeared to be really very level-headed, only a bit romantic. She evidently controlled in a measure her volatile mother. Betty would certainly be made comfortable and, at the same time, not have a chance to make ducks and drakes of a large fortune. As a mother-in-law Philip would not find her such an incumbrance as a step-dame. This explains Sir Frederick's decision and also his early escape from Monte Carlo. The more he pondered over his scheme, the better he liked it. "I believe that girl will keep both of them in order (and they need it!) or *I'm* no judge of human nature. She shall have a free hand, too!"

Lady Betty was baffled, but, as we have seen, the wind-fall to Clare, now providentially made certain (in spite of "the idiot" refusing Philip) by the lat-

ter's opportune death, was a full compensation for her own matrimonial failure.

Lady Betty now returned to the chase, taking the whole field; Latin and Slav as well as Anglo-Saxon. She herself was a cosmopolite, and gold was the same metal everywhere. One imperative necessity imposed itself: to find out the exact truth about the Prince's fortune, the apparently fabulous estate recently disgorged by the Russian Government. She meant to be sure about that, repeating cautiously to herself:

"All this sounds too good to be true, and there is not an atom of testimony except that most scatter-brained witness, Bertie Harding, who is always ready to deny to-day what he asserted yesterday. He calls it diplomacy. Bertie is just the kind of man to be willing to help a friend in need by any sort of a lie. It looks very much as though he were 'sicking' his friend upon a desirable heiress. It may be that they concocted this plan together, and that the talk about the loan raised by Bertie on his expectations is all bosh: and that the whole thing is hung up until Philip Marston's demise is proved.

"I'll be off to London the minute the Duchess comes, and grass won't grow under my feet there before I find out the whole situation. Bertie Harding can't fool me; he knows that! Besides, he is a gentleman, *malgré* his human frailties. So is the Prince. One can see that at a glance, even with his

assumed name. Clare is perfectly safe not to do anything rash. That romantic foolery about Philip Marston will balance her for one thing. We'll see what will happen in London. Perhaps his body will be fished out by that time! Ugh! How ghastly! However, it is the only way to smooth things out at once; and after all it is much pleasanter than to float round indefinitely. I never saw the young man, any way!"

All these thoughts floated through the rippling mind of the "wily widow" as she lay on a sofa in her boudoir,—a round room in the donjon tower, over the dining-room. She was dressed in a white silk Japanese gown embroidered with flying cranes and misty sedges. One foot was held high and waved to and fro in its pink silk integument, which clung skin-like and transparent, revealing the play of five intelligent toes that seemed to take part in her cogitations. This was Lady Betty's prevailing posture, whether sitting or lying; a dining table presenting the only barrier. In fact her legs were never quiescent except when she was fast asleep. Her right foot was like a familiar spirit; always on the alert (often exchanging winks of collusion). It seemed conscious of having been frankly admired, since its emancipation by modern fashion.

The Duchess considered all this behaviour most improper. She could remember the second Empire "and even at that court of the usurper the rule of the

old Monarchy prevailed, that no gentlewoman of the aristocracy should cross her legs — never!" The irrepressible Betty always answered: "My dear Belle-mère, I am English, and the smart set with *us* may turn somersaults if it likes. The only things tabooed at Court (before Royalty) are fringes (which nobody wears nowadays) and divorces (which everybody gets who wants one, gladly renouncing the antique frowsiness of Royal Drawing-rooms!) *We* are moderns!"

"Alas!" rejoined the Duchess; "we, who have not long to live, seem to be the remnant of respectability. Our world has to shut its doors to maintain our code of morals. It is natural in France that this should be so, with a Radical tyranny which is called government. But one might expect stability in England, still a monarchy. Alas! my dear. The wrath of God shall come upon them. You will see!" The Duchess sighed, and Lady Betty laughed and kicked her heels.

## CHAPTER IX

### I

**T**HE Prince appeared next morning punctually at ten. He had walked the five miles from Quimper, having discovered a narrow lane unfit for motor-cars, and a much shorter way than by the Route Nationale. This lane came out opposite the Druid oaks. A high stone wall was built around the forest on three sides, to protect it from intrusion. The rest of the estate in the vicinity of the Château (some 20 hectares in all) was guarded by deep ditches and high banks on which grew beech trees tall and ancient whose roots held the soil in place. These characteristic ditches of Brittany recall the days of the "Chouannerie," having been used as trenches during the struggle of the goat-skin clad warriors who fought and died for the Monarchy. The deepest ditch ran across the front of the estate where it looked like a dry moat. It was spanned by a heavy stone-built bridge, and there was no front gate. The château stood very near the ditch, the old round tower overlooking it on the left as one approached, and barring access on that side, except through a small iron gate with stone posts, between

the tower and the ditch, and leading into the garden. The driveway made a circle before the heavy old front door, and then led away to the right, where a garage and stables defended the approach on that side, spreading out, with kitchen and servants' quarters, as far as another deep ditch that separated the garden and lawn from wide fields of grain. Beyond these fields here and there were scattered stone cottages, with steep thatched roofs.

Prince Borodino was unruffled, even with pedestrian exertion. He had taken his time walking, and the lane was fresh and cool. He wore a wide-brimmed Panama hat, the same white flannels, and a light blue tie. Old Flanchec the butler, standing in the stone-paved hall, begged him politely to enter: "ces dames" were expecting "Monsieur le Prince." A footman, much tanned from field work and not quite at ease in a faded livery with Ducal buttons, had opened the front door, and offered to relieve him of his hat and stick; but Flanchec said Monsieur had better keep his hat, as the ladies were seated in the garden; so Prince Borodino emerged through the glass doors (both thrown wide by Flanchec) of the long drawing-room, and advanced, hat and book in hand, to a shady spot under an arbor of budding crimson ramblers, where the two very attractive female figures were comfortably seated in cushioned garden chairs.

The elder lady beamed upon him, wagging a



white slipper coquettishly as she clasped his outstretched hand. The younger was more discreet, but friendly. Prince Borodino repeated to himself — and his blue eyes spoke the same words as yesterday — “What a beauty — flawless!”

“Fancy walking all the way from Quimper!” exclaimed Lady Betty.

“It is scarcely five miles, and if I drove in a motor all the time, I should lose the use of my legs!”

“I love to walk!” said Clare. “I always walk to church and back when Grand’mère is not here, so that the old swinging coach shan’t be taken out in all its grandeur just for me; and the little church is only two miles away in the direction of Quimper!”

“I *hate* to walk!” said Lady Betty. “I take just enough exercise to keep me limber (for that I have also regular house gymnastics). But what is called a ‘constitutional’ — getting one’s self muddy or dusty, and one’s hair frowsy — I abominate. Besides, *I* am not a church-goer. For one thing, I am not a Romanist like my daughter, so I should not go here in the summer-time anyway. However, I wanted to please the dear Duchess (when I let her make a Papist of my daughter). You know the Duchesse de Beaulieu married my father, Lord Sands, who died six years ago and who always lived in Paris after he retired, (when Bertie Harding’s father was named Ambassador).”

"Lady Clare is a Catholic, then?" murmured the Prince looking intently at her, "and I too."

"No really? But you are a Russian!" Lady Betty looked surprised and incredulous.

Prince Borodino's face flushed and he cast down his eyes.

"My mother's family was of Russian Poland; all Poles are Catholics," he answered, biting his lips and looking very much confused. "If you please, I would rather not talk about it. I think my friend Harding has explained, at least partly, the situation." The young man seemed so distressed that Clare rescued him.

"What book have you brought?"

"I told you yesterday," said the Prince, grateful and relieved, "that I would read aloud to you one of the new successful plays, which is very amusing, and to which everybody is going just now in London. But I shall not literally read the play, which is called 'The Great Adventure.' It was taken from a story 'Buried Alive' by Arnold Bennett, and the story is for me by far the better of the two."

The Prince opened the book and began. Really, he read wonderfully well, and with scarcely a trace of foreign accent. Lady Betty knitted with two immense needles laden with a billowy cloud of white shetland wool, the only "fancy-work" she ever indulged in. She said it was so *active*, and you did

not ever need to think about it. "It keeps one's fingers limber."

Clare was working upon a square canvas, meant ultimately for the seat of a chair: a Lafontaine fable of the cunning fox, with the deluded crow holding in his beak the piece of cheese. She was amused by the life and expression in it; a copy from a tapestry Louis XVI chair. Clare abhorred the old Duchess's big embroidery-frame, although she worked sometimes on its interminable fauteuil design of lavender garlands on a yellow ground to please "Grand'-mère." Outside the arbor a few bees buzzed among the half open roses. Otherwise all was still. Two hours passed like ten minutes. When distant bells and the big clock of the Château burst forth simultaneously, it seemed scarcely credible.

"Midi!" said the Prince, who had just ended a chapter, and closed the book.

"It has been perfectly delightful!" exclaimed Lady Betty.

"The burial at Westminster is wonderful," said Clare.

"That is just one of the things which have to be suppressed, of course, in the play; that and the divine Alice Challis!" Lady Betty remonstrated loudly.

"Do you mean that vulgar red-cheeked, pillowy cook of a woman? Well I *am* glad! Fancy trying to make a stage prima donna out of *her*!"

"They don't attempt it," answered the Prince.

"That, to me, is the chief blemish in the play. A smart and slender young actress ensnares the shy genius's affections — and under another name. The Divine Alice Challis is annihilated!"

"Certainly you are laughing, Prince. You can't be in earnest about such a female."

"A culinary *Diva*, Lady Scromer," rejoined the Prince, "appeals to the heart of man for homage more than the goddesses of Grand Opera."

Lady Betty put down her fluffy knitting. "Well," she said, "I must do a few turns before breakfast." Whereupon, the active impersonation of Watts R. A.'s chefs d'œuvres (after reaching the lawn in a few bounding steps), proceeded to take flying leaps over the flower-beds, back and forth, with the aid of a long, light pole, which had been leaning, ready, against the lattice-work of the arbor.

The Prince and Clare looked at one another and laughed aloud.

"Delsarte?" he asked.

"Yes; and Sandow!" replied Clare.

There seemed to be established between them a first bond of sympathy. "You understand what I mean about Alice Challis?" he asked appealingly. "It is really a pathetic touch in this comic story. A poor fellow, with nobody to care for him personally, hounded after because of his genius, and almost run down by a terrible modern æsthete in the person of a noble British spinster, finds a sudden chance to

drop out of it all. And when he drops out of his previous existence, he finds, already waiting for him, a simple soul — all womanly — prepared to soothe and rest him; to save him, body and soul! Why even the creature comforts become nectar and ambrosia!

Clare meditated. "I agree with you entirely; that is, after marriage. Then, of course, all the common-places of domestic life become a woman's duty. But *before* marriage"—and "Galatea" smiled a romantic smile, "there must be some sentiment; don't you think so? A woman likes to be loved, and for *herself*! Not for being a good cook—or even for her beauty!"

"And a man also might wish to be loved for *himself*, and not for the rank or fortune which he may possess!" said Prince Borodino, so emphatically and in so earnest a tone of his vibrating voice, that Clare blushed crimson, and withdrew a little her frank glance of approbation. The Prince rose at once and put the book on a round table beside Lady Betty's knitting.

"I am glad you like the story," he said in a quite different voice.

"Oh so much! and you will read every day, won't you?"

Prince Borodino did read every day that week: and on two afternoons, Wednesday and Thursday, Lady Betty and Clare took long drives in his motor.

These excursions, one to Concarneau, and the other to the Pointe du Raz, the sharp end of Finisterre, put new life and stir into the stagnant château *vegetation*—as Lady Betty called her seclusion in Brittany. On Friday night, too, the Prince came to dinner, and sang for them, and he played his own accompaniments, making the thin little old *harpsichord* quiver with emotion.

The next day, Saturday, when he walked back to Quimper immediately after luncheon, Prince Borodino called at the Post-Office. Here he found a letter labeled “urgent,” in Bertie Harding’s handwriting. The reading of this missive produced an exceedingly disagreeable impression upon the young man; and chased from his countenance a smile of almost triumphant security which had dwelt upon it all the morning.

## CHAPTER X

### I

“**W**HAT *have* you been about since I saw you?” asked Cynthia Hay. It was her first remark upon meeting Tom Skewton by special arrangement in Hyde Park on Saturday morning. She had come up the night before to the House in Mount Street *en route* for a week-end, at the seat of the old Duke of Windermere, her sister Gladys’s grandfather-in-law, where she and Tom were both expected. “Now tell me at once what you have found out, and how *the case* is progressing. You know I want something to take my mind off our domestic troubles.”

“Troubles!”

“Complications, if you like it better. I suppose you have heard that Gladys and the ‘*Wiscount*’ are coming to live with us. He wants to go into public life, and it is supposed that, with Papa’s help, he would have no trouble getting into Parliament from Tipton. I think it is hard upon Papa!”

“What is?”

“Having two babies in the house, and all that. (The ‘*Wiscount*’ bores him; he is not like you,

Tom). Besides you know, Gladys and I never did hit it off very well. She always wanted to bully me; and she does still. I shall lose more than half my independence. It is worse than getting married."

Tom Skewton was seated upon a bench beside Cynthia. He edged a little nearer. "I *have* heard about it, and have been thinking very hard. First of all, I want to tell you something, Cynthia, that you do not know about. My governor, as you know, is really very rich. No one would think it, for the poor old chap spends nothing upon himself, nor much on me either. I used to think I was kept too strictly, but now I believe the old bird was quite right. I do not feel sure, Cynthia, that I should ever have been so 'rising' a young barrister as I am to-day, if I'd been rich enough to be a young man about town, for I have tendencies toward frolic and levity! Well, we had a talk, he and I, the other night, and (it was really à propos of Gladys's settling down at Brampton) my governor has determined to buy Lindsley Hall only four miles from you, which has been so long for sale."

"The haunted house?"

"Of course; won't it be magnificent to have a ghost of one's own, and to develop others!"

"You would not be scared, Tom?"

"Good gracious, Cynthia! I should think you and I are past getting frightened at ghosts — when we already own a whole family of them. Now this



whole business is got up by my father as a refuge for yours."

"And where do *I* come in, Tom? Am I to be left at home to rock Gladys's babies, while all the rest of the family is gallivanting?"

"*Now*, I am coming to the point!"

Cynthia got up at once.

"I am off! Really, Tom Skewton, you are too prosaic. A girl *must* have a little romance."

"Really, Cynthia, you do not know what I was going to say!"

"I *do* know; that is the worst of it."

Tom appeared to be aggrieved. "Then I won't say it!"

Cynthia looked still more put out. Instead of leaving Hyde Park through the entrance near-by and wending her way along Mount Street, she whisked straight off in the opposite direction to a secluded spot sheltered by trees and shrubbery.

Tom followed her, a pleased smile spreading over his face. This was behind Cynthia's back. When he overtook her, Tom Skewton walked two steps ahead, and then turned about and dropping suddenly upon one knee: "Cynthia, darling!" he almost shouted, "my fate is in your hands. You know I love you! Will you be my wife? Will you marry me and live in Lindsley Hall? With me and the governor *and* the ghosts?"

"Oh, Tom, you fool!" cried Cynthia, much

fluttered. "How can you be so absurd? Supposing any one saw us!"

Tom sprang to his feet, dusting the gravel from the knees of his gray trousers.

"My darling!" he repeated in a lower tone, "now that you have said 'yes' I can be more reasonable."

"But I did not say 'yes'!"

"Was it 'no'?" Tom grew melodramatic again.

"Oh, you goose!"

"Then it is 'yes'?"

Cynthia looked up at him and he immediately kissed her.

"Of course it is!" said Tom.

A very happy looking couple emerged five minutes later from the sheltering grove.

"All this time," said Cynthia, "you have told me nothing about *the case*. I do not believe you have discovered anything."

"I have discovered so much," replied Tom, "or rather — I have been making so many deductions from what I know already, that now (the engrossing anxiety of my life being relieved) — *now* that I am the happiest of men — I shall give my whole time to *the Case* for a while."

"But with *me* to help!" retorted Cynthia.

"I will tell you all about it after dinner to-night. The plot really does thicken!"

"Then you believe that Bertie Harding —"

"I don't *believe* anything definite as yet. In fact I am not quite so sure of Bertie Harding's guilt —"

"Then you have given up your suspicion of foul play?"

"The 'foul play,'" said Tom in a low voice, as they approached the front door of the house on Mount Street, "lies at the door of that man, Borodino. Bertie may only have been his tool. To-night, after dinner, I will tell you all I have found out — and perhaps more; for I am expecting news to-day about another clue."

"Oh, Tom, how exciting! You will soon have the whole mystery unravelled and in your own hands! And then you are going to act?"

"When the time comes for action," answered Tom, "it must be swift and sure. That scoundrel shall not escape!"

"Where is he now, Tom?"

"Just at present Prince Borodino is making 'la cour' most ardently to Clare Tempest at the Château de Beaulieu."

"Good gracious, Tom, how dreadful!"

## II

Tom Skewton sat in his office, waiting for the clock to strike eleven. The events of the morning and his brisk walk from Mount Street had made his eyes gleam and his cheeks glow. The latter suffusion was also caused by memory.

"Cynthia kissed me!" Tom murmured. The future that he had dreamed of, vaguely at college and more definitely since his admission to the bar, had become the present. A distinct event often rehearsed had really happened. Things had taken place rapidly, almost unexpectedly, and in Hyde Park, which had never been the imaginary scene of this climax; but it was all over almost before he knew it.

"She met me half-way," he exulted. "Bless her! I felt sure she would."

It was hard to descend to every-day affairs; but nevertheless "the case" (as Tom and Cynthia called it) presented such abnormal and unusual points that the amateur detective greeted Foley, who was ushered in on the stroke of the clock, with a keen professional glance and a business-like —

"Good morning, Foley." Tom confronted the expected visitor and motioned him to be seated in a chair facing the light, which was Tom's habit with clients and witnesses.

Foley was not at all at his ease. The poor man had a badgered and crest-fallen air, far different from the trim and self-conceited Foley who had "valeted" Sir Frederick Marston. In the course of his testimony, he had been cross-examined by Tom Skewton so thoroughly—"turned inside out" as he described the process, that Foley had come to the office on this occasion quite under pro-

test; and even ventured to begin the conversation.

"May I ask what it is *now*, sir, that you wish to see me about? I have just got a new place, sir, Mr. Skewton; and it's 'ard for me, gettin' away on a week-day, sir."

"I shall not keep you long this time, Foley. Don't worry."

Tom looked at a memorandum which lay before him on the table, and read to himself aloud:

"James Foley testifies:

"1st, That his master, Philip Marston, left his house in Park Lane, and was driven to the Savoy Hotel at eight o'clock on Tuesday, April 25th.

"2nd. Mr. Marston took with him in the motor a Gladstone bag." Tom Skewton raised his head.

"Now, Foley, you did not state what that bag might contain, to the best of your knowledge. You only said that you had not packed it. Think a moment: can you give any further information on this subject?"

"Well, sir, you see, at first I was told to keep out of Mr. Philip's rooms, and the doors were locked by your father's orders; but this week I was requested to put his things to rights, because all the letters and papers had been gone over, and them and all valuables, jewelry and such like, was taken to your father's offices, sir, and put in the safe."

"What is the result of your putting things to rights? What clothes are missing, if any?"

"Why, sir, there's a new suit that Mr. Philip had only worn once before his father's death. That is gone; and a shirt and some pocket-handkerchiefs, and a scarf-tie, and the studs, sir, and sleeve-buttons that were in the shirt he took off when he was dressing for dinner. I always took them out, sir, myself when his clothes went to the wash, and I did notice, sir, that they were not left in that shirt the very night Mr. Philip went away. And I hunted for them this week, and they're not to be found. They were just plain gold, sir, and they were not with the things Mr. Skewton, your father, took away,—watches and pins and sleeve-links and the like, that Mr. Philip had from *his* father, Sir Frederick, who was rather a rich dresser, sir."

"Now, Foley, what do you conclude became of those buttons? Do you think Mr. Philip himself put them into the bag with the suit of clothes and the shirt?"

"I do, sir."

"Then you think he meant to stay away all night?"

Foley's eyes filled with tears.

"I don't think that, sir. There was no night clothes, nor his dressing-case. All his pajamas is there in his room and his brushes and everything. Oh, Mr. Skewton, sir!" Foley put his handkerchief to his eyes and sobbed.

"What is it?" asked Tom.

"It is my belief, sir, that my poor young master meant to drown himself in them clothes — not his evening ones — I don't know why — and that he done it!"

"Then," said Tom Skewton quickly, "you believe that Mr. Marston changed his clothes at Mr. Harding's rooms when he went there at one o'clock in the morning with Prince Borodino?"

"That must have been what 'appened, sir."

"You know the chauffeur, Watson, testified that he took the Gladstone bag to Mr. Harding's rooms after leaving Mr. Marston at the Savoy?"

"I remember, sir."

Tom Skewton consulted a sheet of paper. "The chauffeur said he left the bag outside the door of Mr. Harding's flat, as there seemed to be nobody there. He rang for five minutes and even rapped on the door. Mr. Harding was out and had let his man go to Clapham to see his mother that afternoon, and gave him leave to stay all night."

"I remember that well, sir. His name is Vealy and I don't think much of him."

"Now, Foley, I am only going to ask you one more question: do you know what sleeve-links and studs Mr. Philip wore that night?"

"Of course, sir; since it is me as always put them in. The studs was them beautiful pearls of Sir Frederick's; the roundest and finest ever I seen; four

of them, too, sir, in the set, though never more than three showed."

"And the sleeve-links?"

"They was Sir Frederick's star sapphires set in diamonds. Mr. Philip was not one to dress up like that, sir; but that night I seen him looking at them when I come in, and he says: 'Foley, I think I will wear these to-night. I like to feel that I have about me something of my father's.' He knew how fond I was of Sir Frederick!"

"Then you believe that the evening clothes and the jewelry were left at Mr. Harding's and your master went out from there, after making the change, dressed in a morning suit?"

"Why, sir, that is what I think *now*, since I missed the clothes. But did not Mr. Harding tell you anything about that, sir, nor about the bag?"

"Mr. Harding, Foley, testified that he was not in a condition to know what happened at his rooms that night, and he denied all knowledge of any Gladstone bag. He said there was nothing of the kind at his door when he came home, at midnight. That will do, Foley; I am much obliged," and Tom Skewton slipped a sovereign into Foley's hand, and rang the bell to have him shown out.

### III

It was half past eleven. What he had heard set Tom Skewton thinking. Were all his suspicions



unfounded? This fact of a change of clothes, on Philip Marston's part, might point to deliberate suicide. He had not wished to have his father's jewels in such ghastly juxtaposition, and perhaps also, his actor's imagination revolted from the hideous spectacle of a slimy thing in damp evening clothes fished out of the Thames in the glaring light of day. It was grotesque and evoked Mr. Mantalini's "dem'd moist and unpleasant body."

The more Tom pondered over this the more likely it all seemed; and yet (in that case) why had Bertie Harding said nothing about the clothes, and not produced them and the very valuable jewels? Tom marked this down as something to be investigated. He now started upon the Prince Borodino track, consulting another memorandum. The night watchman had seen only "one gent" coming away, down the stairs. Now this assertion tallied exactly with Philip's change of raiment. Naturally it would have delayed him perhaps a quarter of an hour. The fact that Prince Borodino had testified to walking away in company with Philip Marston was really of no moment. The Prince might very naturally have thought it not worth mentioning that he had waited or loitered in the street a few minutes before being joined by his companion. Tom was almost depressed as he felt his sensational mystery and "foul play" growing doubtful. For, as to the

overcoat and hat, he had already discovered that they really were hidden in the bush near the obelisk. Both the chauffeur of the taxi and a policeman had been witnesses of their discovery by Prince Borodino and Bertie Harding.

Tom scratched his head and put back the memoranda into a drawer of his writing-table.

“All the same, there are queer points about the whole business that Bertie Harding must clear up. And Philip Marston’s will certainly is queer, although I admit I was rather carried away by a passion for sensations (I’d been reading a recent Conan Doyle) when I even went the length of imagining a diabolic plot and a forged will. I was getting excited about Cynthia that evening in the moonlight, and almost had it out with her then and there. She looked so lovely. But an awful fear that she *might* say ‘no’ restrained me; and so I gave a free rein to my vivid imagination and fired a whole train of sensational suppositions to take my mind off. Really, it all seemed plausible at the time: lurid, and exciting. Even Harry Lumsden, that steady and plodding practitioner, I felt might be concerned in the plot, as one of Philip’s heirs. It is funny how a man can pursue a case like this (given his suspicions as a foundation of fact), and everything at once seems to chime in. Certainly Lumsden’s manner at the investigation was terribly against him. He was

furiously sulky. He testified that he considered Philip Marston to be 'not in his right mind,' and he emphasized it by adding,—

“‘I mean that a man in Philip Marston’s mental condition,— acute neurasthenia,— is capable of anything abnormal, either absurdity or tragedy.’

He did not even seem grieved over his best friend’s death; and then he went off next day to Scotland, fishing, and has not come back yet. Even now, that will *does* seem queer,— that Lumsden and Harding should be left sole heirs to such a lot of money: and the hand-writing looks so jerky too!

Next comes this Prince Borodino. He has gone to Brittany, Bertie admits, and says that he gave the Prince a letter to Lady Scromer. Of course there is only one object in all this; that the Prince shall wed an heiress. But, after all, that is an everyday occurrence. There is nothing really *against* the man that I *know* except that he was the last person with Philip Marston; the last man who saw him alive. That is really not in itself a criminal charge; although last week I was almost ready to think so.”

At this moment the door opened and Tom Skewton’s servant put in his head. “A person — a man — wants to know if he can see you. He won’t give me his name, sir.”

“Show him in.”

A shambling step was heard outside. Next came in sight a sinuous figure dressed in shabby black,

surmounted by a white, pasty face, deep-set slits of eyes, red eye-brows, and lank red hair brushed in damp locks that curled up like a wig from ear to ear at the back of the head.

“My name is Vealy, sir; Samuel Vealy; and I was Mr. Herbert Harding’s valet. He dismissed me about three weeks ago: and I have come to see you, sir.”

Samuel Vealy’s mouth smiled a toothless smile (that is, his teeth never showed) and the smile was meant to propitiate, but the little green eyes looked furtive.

## CHAPTER XI

“**I** HAVE seen you before, Vealy,” said Tom Skewton, eying the intruder with marked distaste. “Your testimony was worth nothing at all. You were out at Clapham on the night of Mr. Mars-ton’s suicide, and when you returned next morning, your master was already up and dressed. An hour later you gave him a telegram while he was eating breakfast. That, according to my report, was all you had to say.”

Tom had taken from a drawer a sheet of paper to which he was referring.

“It is all I *did* say at that time, at all events, Mr. Skewton.”

Samuel Vealy held his head on one side, and half shut one eye. Tom’s curiosity rose to the bait. He was young and Vealy was cunning.

“What more could you have said?”

“Well, sir, that was the question I asked myself both at the time and afterwards: and it seemed to me that what I could tell would be no use by itself. In fact it is subsequent events which gives it *value*.” Vealy dwelt upon the last word.

“What the devil have you been doing — eaves-dropping?”

Vealy came a step closer.

"You may have observed, Mr. Skewton, from my appearance — and language — that I have not been a servant all my life. I was down on my luck when I accompanied Mr. Harding to Russia, as his valet. Any one can see I am above my station."

This was true; there was about Samuel Vealy's personality a very disagreeable mixture of shabby gentility and a slinking furtiveness.

Tom Skewton was very clever — in fact almost too clever, overleaping himself sometimes — but he was apt to draw correct conclusions from outward appearances. He eyed Samuel Vealy up and down very deliberately; a process which caused that individual to squirm visibly, and even to edge sideways like a wary crab toward concealment. Tom noticed the glance cast toward the knob of the door.

"Sit down!" he said suddenly. Samuel Vealy edged swiftly back and sat down upon the chair, hard and leather-seated (arranged especially for clients and facing the barrister). The latter remained motionless at his table, both arms resting on the blotting pad and an ivory paper-cutter in his right hand. Tom Skewton confronted Samuel Vealy for some embarrassing moments with an unwinking stare that never for a second swerved from its focus. Samuel, however, nearly closed the half-shut blinds that defended his visual organs, and bent his head, still held on one side, his short-sighted gaze appar-

ently occupied in exploring the interior of a dusty bowler hat, the brim of which was held level on either side by two thumbs with bitten nails. It was a strained position.

"I believe you, Samuel Vealy," said Tom presently, "when you say you don't look at all like a gentleman's servant. Whether you belong to a '*higher station*' in life is a matter of taste or opinion." The barrister now came out in earnest:

"Samuel Vealy, I am going to tell you what I take you to be." Tom Skewton shook his right hand at Samuel Vealy, and still holding the paper knife, wagged it slowly like an accusing finger,—a trick he had noticed in a very distinguished senior at the bar. "I take you for a member of the detective service, and of a very shady kind."

Samuel Vealy's pose changed as if by galvanism. He plunged a lean and sinewy red hand into the bowler hat, brought out a soiled pocket-handkerchief, mopped his face, and, sitting up quite straight, he ceased to be either furtive or ingratiatory.

"You've hit it, sir, first time. I am a member of a bureau of information in Paris, for which I've done a good deal of work off and on. It was in that capacity that I went with Mr. Harding to Russia, as his valet (of course he did not know this). There was information wanted at Petersburg by my employers (I won't tell you just who they are, sir) and they put me on the job."

"And Mr. Harding engaged you as his valet without any recommendations?"

"Oh, that was fixed up all right, sir. He was pleased that I could speak French well and some Roosian, which is true, and also that I had valeted a Grand-Dook — which was *not*."

"You have left Mr. Harding's service?"

Samuel Vealy's eyes looked vindictive, and his sharp nose wrinkled in a snarl, although his loose lips smiled, not a tooth showing.

"Mr. Harding dismissed me, sir."

"Why?"

"It was the afternoon of the day when Mr. Mars-ton drowned himself. I won't conceal the truth from you, Mr. Skewton, for that is what I am here for. I was listening at the bedroom door, where him and that Prince and Dr. Lumsden were talking, and Mr. Harding caught me. He turned me out then and there, Mr. Skewton, and that is why I've come to you, sir."

"What for?"

"To sell you what I know, and to offer you my professional services for further investigation."

"How about your 'bureau' in Paris?"

Samuel Vealy scowled.

"I will tell you the honest truth, sir. The Roosian business went wrong, and I was accused of being the cause of it; and I left their service, sir. What is more, I don't mean to go back to them at all,



sir. I am favorably known, sir, at the Paris Préfecture."

"Oh!" said Tom; "and will you be definite, please, as to what you want of me? I have no time to waste; it is past twelve."

"I said it was to sell you what I know —"

"Oh, bosh! You don't expect me to buy a pig in a poke." Tom Skewton was eagerly curious but he held himself in.

"Indeed, no, sir; I mean to impart to you first and foremost (free of any charge whatever, sir) the most important *facts* in the whole case."

Samuel Vealy leaned across the table opposite Tom and held up a solemn nail-bitten forefinger.

"Mr. Philip Marston never drowned himself at all, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that those two murdered him!"

The marrow of Tom's bones seemed turned to jelly. It was not the words of Samuel Vealy that sent this quiver through him. It was the man's face. His shifty green eyes grew tense, with lids wide open, and they stared straight into Tom's eyes, and his loose mouth tightened into a horizontal crease. It was the face of a man terrified at his own speech.

Samuel Vealy was in dead earnest at last. He had something to tell.

"That night-watchman was right, Mr. Skewton;

only one gentleman came out, after he saw the *two* going upstairs. That one was Prince Borodino, and it is my belief that he was carrying (hid under his cloak) the coat and hat of Mr. Marston, which he and Mr. Harding found in that bush next morning."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because, Mr. Skewton, I believe that when Prince Borodino left Mr. Harding's rooms, Mr. Marston was lying there—murdered!" Again came the look of horror, turning the crafty face into a tragic mask.

"But you came back at eight o'clock that very morning, Vealy. How could the body have been concealed before that time, and no trace be left?"

"You had better ask Dr. Lumsden that question, sir! A doctor has a pretty free hand dealing with corpses and disposing of dissected 'subjects,' Mr. Skewton. I've even heard tell that Dr. Lumsden has a dissecting-room and a laboratory of his own built out in the garden of his flat which is on the ground floor. He got permission to build it under the name of a 'dining-room and kitchen.' He never eats at home except his breakfast. His valet cooks that on a little stove next his study. The neighbors have got wind of Dr. Lumsden's doings. They don't like it. They say large boxes come into the Doctor's at night and in the early morning. They want to complain, but they don't know how to

begin, sir. I got all this information in following up a trunk I'm going to tell you about. Dr. Lumsden brought it there all right. Prince Borodino came to stay with Dr. Lumsden that same night, sir, — leaving his hotel. He stayed there until he went to France, Mr. Skewton. And let me tell you one thing more. When the Prince went away he took that same trunk with him, with an S. B. painted on the ends of it. I suppose they fixed it like new *inside*, sir,— they are clever enough; for the man that painted the letters told me he noticed nothing unusual, no stains or anything, though he tested the lock, too. You can see, Mr. Skewton, how every trace is wiped out? I doubt if the neighbors will say anything now (especially as they can't call it, strictly speaking, a nuisance). They all agree there is never any smell, sir; only black smoke going up from the chimney sometimes.

“Dr. Lumsden is a rich man now — or thinks he is going to be when Mr. Marston's *decease* is proved. He could build a museum for preparations of his own; like a fine one I saw in Paris. I've an artistic eye, sir, and really some of those things are beautiful to look at. I mind one well. It was a hand like ivory, with the most delicate and beautiful silver tracery running all through, made, I'm told, by quicksilver injected into the capillaries. I've seen kidneys, sir, looking like the loveliest pink coral, and brains —”

Samuel Vealy was watching Tom Skewton during this long digression, purposely keeping back as long as he could the most important item of information, in order to enhance its value and whet Tom's curiosity, which now was strained to the breaking-point.

"Confound your kidneys and brains!" broke in the excited barrister. "Explain at once and clearly what is the meaning of all this talk about a trunk. Do you mean to assert that Dr. Lumsden took a hand in this horrible affair — yes or no!"

"As accessory after the fact, Mr. Skewton. I don't think he had anything to do with the killing, sir,— only with taking away the body. You see, when I came home at eight o'clock that morning, the lift-boy told me before I went upstairs that when he came on duty at seven o'clock, Mr. Harding and Dr. Lumsden was carrying out a new and shiny trunk that they had just brought down themselves in the lift. He said there was a four-wheeler at the door, and Dr. Lumsden drove away in it with the trunk on top. He was looking awful put out; 'not a bit like a doctor,' the lift-boy said. He told me he had often seen Dr. Lumsden there, but never so early, nor looking so queer. The boy asked if my master (if he was not sick) might be going on a journey anywheres? Well, of course at that time I thought nothing about this, Mr. Skewton. In fact it was only by piecing it in with the watchman's

story and all the other testimony at the examination that I made out what I am telling you to-day. So now, Mr. Skewton, you have the case complete: spread out before you, open and above board. You may *take* it or *leave* it, sir!

"I have only two questions to ask in the former event:

"1st. What will you pay me now, sir, for a few farther details of importance known only to myself?

"2nd. Will you hire me to follow up the case, sir (paying the habitual wages by the day)? I do not ask for an assistant, Mr. Skewton."

Samuel Vealy rose and shook himself, coming out of the process a wiry and alert figure, a complete contrast to the shambling flabbiness which he had assumed as befitting to a "gentleman's valet."

"Finally, Mr. Skewton, in case you decide in my favor, what am I to expect as a reward, when we've run them down, at the end of the job, sir?"

Tom's blood was up; his mania as an amateur detective was let loose.

"I'll give you twenty pounds down now," he said, "for these 'farther details.' I will pay you to follow up the case (under my supervision and dictation) whatever is the usual amount; and I will guarantee to you a reward of two hundred pounds when the criminals are brought to justice. Now for these 'farther details,' Mr. Vealy, if you please."

After Tom Skewton had heard what Vealy had to impart (which he called his "pieces of conviction") all doubt as to the justice of "the case" was laid at rest, once for all. The promised twenty pounds was safely stowed in the coat-pocket of Samuel Vealy, along with an agreement to pay a further remuneration of two hundred pounds "when the guilty person or persons shall be convicted."

The parting of Thomas Skewton and the ex-valet of Bertie Harding, differed widely from their meeting so short a while before. Tom almost shook hands when he said good-bye, but refrained.

As to Samuel Vealy, he marched away up the street with his head held high, and a rakish slant to his bowler hat. However shady his past may have been in many ways, he really believed that now he was laboring not only for his own profit but in the cause of justice. He felt also a conviction that the laborer was worth the hire. Samuel Vealy, almost for the first time in a checkered career, felt a glow of genuine self-respect.

## CHAPTER XII

DINNER was over at the Duke of Windermere's, and the guest of honor, a Royal Princess, was enduring with amiable ennui the attentions inflicted upon Royalties at small social functions, where sedate accomplishments or anecdotes of a time-honored facetiousness are exhibited in song or recitation. A young girl in white muslin had warbled the inevitable "simple ballad," a facetious retired officer with a grey moustache had rendered a comic monologue of a by-gone period, in the course of which he drew his legs up to the top of a table where he was seated and barked like a dog. After this, another very playful old gentleman repeated a quite ancient British anecdote, of an elderly aunt in a large hoop-skirt, under which two bull-dogs intruded themselves and fought a battle. It was all very simple, and belonged to the old order that never changes. No "smart set" ever appeared at the Duke of Windermere's week-end dinners, and the circle about the Princess was amiable and old-fashioned,—repeating the performances of past generations.

Far different was the scene in the superb conservatory,—an Arabian Night's dream of palms and

sparkling water, with subdued and supernatural lights, shining like the magic fruit in Aladdin's garden. Here in a secluded corner Tom Skewton had kissed Cynthia Hay just after dinner, and here they now sat plunged in excited talk (literally tête-à-tête) upon a cushioned settee, sheltered from intrusion by a spreading cocoa-palm.

"Tell me all about it," Cynthia had demanded.

And Tom complied. He gave a detailed account of his whole interview with Samuel Vealy, ending with these words:

"It is really rather creepy and curdling, but I promised to tell you everything."

"Oh, yes, Tom," said Cynthia, sitting a little closer. "Tell me all! It is more exciting than a Conan Doyle story, because we know the people—all except that deadly foreigner, and we *saw him* (I never shall forget it) that night at the Savoy with poor Philip Marston."

Cynthia shivered. "It is almost like *seeing* the murder. Go on! You have not yet told me that bit of most important evidence which he kept until the last?"

"Vealy informed me that Lumsden came back to Bertie Harding's that same afternoon (in his own motor this time) bringing Prince Borodino with him."

"You mean, Tom, the very day that he had taken away *the trunk* early in the morning?"



"Yes, and I forgot to say that Vealy lurked about in Lumsden's neighborhood that same morning until twelve o'clock; and that between ten and twelve o'clock, a heavy and greasy looking smoke rolled out of the chimney of the doctor's 'kitchen.' When he mentioned this fact to a green-grocer who stood at his shop door, the man said it was not unusual; and added darkly:

" 'He don't keep house, Dr. Lumsden don't; only eats his breakfast at 'ome,' and then he added: 'Them doctors does queer things!'"

"Oh, Tom, do go on!"

"Vealy said that when the three men had shut themselves up in Bertie Harding's 'den,' he himself crept to the door that led into it from the bed-room, and applied his ear to the key-hole. He held a coat of Bertie's over his left arm and a clothes-brush in his right hand, 'for fear of accidents.' The three must have been standing very near the open window; for at first Vealy could only hear an indistinct murmur of voices. 'At last,' he said, 'I heard Dr. Lumsden's voice: "I have done what I can to help you two madmen, and I will do nothing more!" he cried. "As to that crazy will—" "Oh, as to *that*," put in Mr. Harding, in a tone of disgust, "Old Skewton says we can't touch a penny of it until the *decease* is proved. That is why we thought it a good idea (and I telephoned you at 12 o'clock about it) to arrange to have 'the body' found in the

Thames. And then you got so mad——” Then followed a few words that escaped the listening ears of Vealy, except a fragment of a sentence, spoken by Prince Borodino:

“ ‘Doctors have usually plenty of “subjects.” ’ At this point Dr. Lumsden broke in: He was furious, and he stuttered so I could hardly hear him:

“ ‘ “I tell you two that I’ve finished with this business! What you ask is preposterous! I wash my hands of you both. I am off to Scotland this afternoon,” ’ and Vealy heard the door of the den flung open, heavy steps in the ante-room, and the front door outside closed with a slam; Lumsden had departed.”

“What happened next?” asked Cynthia.

“Vealy continued (I will repeat his exact words)—

“ ‘My blood near froze in my veins, used as I am to crimes, when I heard that Prince Borodino laugh.

“ ‘ “You see,” he said, in his smooth voice and foreign way of speaking, “there is going to be trouble about *proving* that suicide, and getting at the money; and we must have money soon.”

“ ‘ “I am very hard up myself, as I told you,” says Mr. Harding. “I shall try to raise a loan on my ‘expectations’—but supposing I can’t?”

“ ‘ “I’ve just a hundred pounds in the world at present,” says the Prince, “and I told you I must stop in Paris and get a lot of good clothes to take to

Brittany,—besides hiring a car for a month, for which I shall have to pay cash down (even with your recommendation), half the money in advance. There will not be much left,” he says, “of that hundred pounds of mine by the time I get to Brittany.”

““I’ll see the old Jew this afternoon,” says Mr. Harding, “and let you know the result.”

““It is a maddening delay,” said the Prince, “But it can make no difference in *my* plans. I’m obliged to be off to Paris to-night, and I shall go to Brittany in a week or so, loan or no loan.”’”

Cynthia shuddered.

“How horrible! Think of Clare Tempest!”

“Yes, it could not be worse,” rejoined Tom, “for that poor girl. I don’t doubt that fellow can be fascinating, and she is so young and romantic. My father showed me, after his death, the letter she wrote to poor Philip Marston, which seemed to us to have been the last straw to upset his mind, and made us accept the suicide as genuine.”

“But, Tom, dear, you said that Vealy was *caught* while listening?”

“Oh, yes; I forgot to finish his tale. He says he was so ‘flabbergasted’ that he just stayed where he was, waiting for the two men to go out by the door that Lumsden had left open, and he expected to hear Harding shut it. There was, however, such a noise in the street just then that he could hear no sound from the next room: and suddenly the door where

he crouched was violently thrown open, nearly knocking him over, and Bertie Harding and Prince Borodino stood before him. 'They seemed almost like they had 'ad suspicions,' Vealy concluded. The rest may be imagined."

"But what shall you do, Tom? Can't you save Clare Tempest?"

"We are obliged to have more evidence. We must, at least, get enough for a plausible case to lay before the authorities. That fellow, Vealy, is a shady person. I don't know how much to believe of what he tells me about himself and his past. He finally assured me that while he has broken with the private detective bureau that employed him to 'shadow' rich Anglo-Saxons amusing themselves in Paris, he is still employed often by the 'Préfecture de Police,' to 'investigate' any foreigners in Paris, English and American, about whom the government desires to have a 'dossier.' He speaks French 'just the same as English,' he says, and I can believe it. The few French words he repeated (spoken by this Russian villain when Vealy was eavesdropping) were without the faintest British accent. Vealy claims to be the offspring of a French actor and an English barmaid. The acquaintance was made in London, when his father, named Villers, was playing minor parts in a French troupe with 'la divine Sarah.' Vealy says his mother came to Paris after her marriage and that

his father died four years later, of absinthe and in debt. He also told me that the 'famous artiste' helped his mother to establish a *pension* in the Quartier Latin, for English and American art students. Vealy says she keeps it still, and in proof of this showed me a rather soiled card on which was printed 'Madame A. Villers, Pension Anglaise' with the address. It may sound *fishy*," Tom concluded, laughing, "but it really seems to explain *Vealy*, and his peculiarities; at all events, his services may be of great value to me, and I will direct him. Vealy says there will be no trouble getting a warrant (and an assistant if necessary) from the Préfecture when we have the case shaped out. You see, Cynthia, I don't want to take any *active* part if I can avoid it; being a barrister by profession and only an *amateur* detective!"

"How soon can Vealy act? The sooner the better for poor Clare Tempest, Tom!"

"I should think that in a week or two," replied Tom Skewton in his most judicial manner, "we may be in a position to leave Paris for Brittany, armed with a warrant to arrest both the Prince and Harding. We shall swoop down upon the Château de Beaulieu, and pounce upon Borodino before he has time to turn round and we shall scoop up Harding in Paris on the way back."

Cynthia whistled. "Tom, you are a wonder!"

Tom Skewton kissed her hand in grateful acknowledgment of the compliment.

"And now about *ourselves*, Cynthia darling. I shall 'speak' to your father Monday morning."

"I've already told him, Tom, at lunch to-day!"

"No, really! And what did he say?"

"He's as pleased as Punch! I knew he would be, dear old dad. I was sure he felt aghast about Gladys's babies coming into the house at Brampton. You know they are turned loose out of the nursery whenever they please, and run in and out of the rooms seeking what they may devour just like little wild beasts! They will leave sticky finger-marks on Papa's precious books in the library if he does not lock the door and keep the key. They have a very ornamental governess who can't do a thing with them and does not even try. Besides, Gladys bullies Papa too, as well as me! He says he will now have a refuge to crawl into; he and his old friend John. Papa says he thinks he will give up the country house to the nobility, and divide his time between Mount Street and *us*."

"And you are sure, Cynthia, you would not rather be 'nobility'? Skewton is such an ugly name," said Tom ruefully.

"I shall be Mrs. *You*, Tom," was Cynthia's only answer, unconsciously echoing the words of *Colette*, — for Cynthia was ignorant of "*Les Misérables*."

## CHAPTER XIII

### I

**W**HEN Clare Tempest came out of the little church after seven o'clock mass on Sunday, she was surprised to see Prince Borodino evidently waiting for her. It was agreeable, but slightly embarrassing; for it implied a strong personal impulse, aside from religious duty.

"I had no idea," Clare said, after they had shaken hands like old friends, "that you would think of coming so far to mass and at this early hour. The Cathedral is so beautiful, and quite near your hotel."

"I like to get up early, and I am fond of walking," responded the Prince with a look that implied more than the words. It made Clare blush. She started to walk along the narrow path between the humble graves of the rustic cemetery, where a few women with little children knelt before wreathed crosses less time-worn and lichen-covered than the majority,—probably a ghastly harvest gleaned from the ocean after one of those tempests which in Brittany are the cause of so many deaths of men in the vigor of life. Tears always came to Clare's eyes

when she looked upon the resigned and patient grief of these miserably poor widows and helpless children: she knew them all, and every year the number grew. The Prince noticed the tears in her blue eyes as he caught up with her. They made him bold to say:

"Won't you let me walk home with you — part of the way at least?" (A girl with so tender a heart would surely not discourage his advance toward more than friendship — if he showed tact.)

"I am not going back immediately," Clare answered, a little dubious, but not at all displeased, for Borodino already began to fascinate the romantic girl. "Grand'mère," she thought would certainly not have allowed this tête-à-tête, although to walk *alone* was freely permitted to Clare in the country. Mamma, however, had not only allowed, but, under some circumstances, urged Clare to stroll in the garden at Monte Carlo with one companion of the other sex; and sometimes things had happened during these walks which had not been repeated into the maternal ear: supplications which were, or at least *sounded* ardent, answered by an emphatic "No!" Lady Betty had been discouraged at her failure as a match-making mother, thinking that her eligible "partis" had not "come up to the scratch" in spite of maternal encouragement; but whenever she had "sounded" Clare, nothing came to the surface.



"I suppose, Mamma, they were more or less bored, and that is why they went away."

It was not an altogether inexperienced *jeune fille*, therefore, who lifted her eyes and said—"I shall be glad to have your company if you don't mind my waiting a minute to speak to the Curé."

The Curé was short and square, with a tanned face seared by the sun and wind. His eyes were light grey and very kindly, with a shrewd gleam of humor that relieved the sadness of his thin-lipped mouth, turned down at the corners. His hair was still quite black, with a few silver threads at the temples, although he must have been past seventy. As he came down the path from the church, the Curé stopped to speak a kind word to the kneeling women, and patted the children's heads, when they ran up to greet him, with paternal affection. Poor little fatherless ones! Monsieur le Curé was their standby,—a sure help, even if he scolded sometimes. He was the personal friend and protector of every one of his poor flock, and the dispenser of the Duchess's charities.

When he saw Clare Tempest waiting in the lane, the Curé's face beamed. "My dear child!" he cried; and then paused, noticing the unusual young man who stood beside her. In fact Prince Borodino was more than "unusual" to the Curé. That worthy priest had never seen anything at all like him, and he eyed the Prince through narrowed eyelids,

with a look of curiosity tinged with obvious distrust.

"Monsieur is a Catholic?" The tone of the question was almost incredulous.

Prince Borodino's answer was harsh in tone; and his eyebrows drew together.

"I *am* a Catholic, Monsieur le Curé, a born Catholic!"

"Monsieur is staying at the château?"

Clare hastily answered that Prince Borodino was stopping at a hotel in Quimper, but that he was a friend of her mother, Lady Scromer — or rather, she added in some confusion, he was a friend of Lady Scromer's friend, — Mr. Harding, — who had written about him. She then hastily conveyed a message sent by the Duchess in her last letter, and seemed anxious to be gone.

"Madame la Duchesse will be coming soon, I hope?" the Curé said, when they parted, still looking askance at the *Prince russe*.

"In two weeks — perhaps sooner," answered Clare, as she turned away and walked swiftly along the lane, with her tall and picturesque companion. She was feeling hurt at the Curé's manner, which she saw had offended Prince Borodino.

As to the Curé, he stood planted where they had left him, and the look upon his face was one of puzzled displeasure.

"Is that poor child to be left to the tender mercy of her foolish mother? Last year after she came

from Monte Carlo she had much to tell me, poor little Clare — the child that I received into the Church four years ago. I advised her as best I could, but I know little of such a world as the ‘*beau monde*.’ This stranger looks to me very suspicious. He has a false air. He never once looked me square in the face. He noticed how I felt, too, about him. I observed a furtive glance in his eye. Well, well! I must do what I can. I *must* do what I can to shield that lamb of my little flock until the Duchess comes, and then I shall warn the ‘Grand’mère’ who desires, above all, that the dear child be saved from a disastrous marriage. She is so young and innocent, and now she is a rich heiress, poor child, to be courted for her fortune. I wonder if this Russian is really a Catholic. I shall find out.”

The good old Curé went home to breakfast much “intrigué” to use his own expression. While eating a slice of thick bread and drinking his *café au lait* he questioned the housekeeper, Marietta, who had been cook for many years to a widowed Marquise — a cousin of the Duchess — and had seen the “beau monde” in Paris.

“You were at the château yesterday morning with a message to Flanchec, were you not?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Curé.”

“Did you happen to see a young gentleman there?”

“I did, Monsieur le Curé, from the pantry win-

dow. He was reading out of a book to the two ladies near the rose arbor, in the garden."

"How did he strike you, Marietta,—you who have seen much aristocratic society in Paris?"

"Monsieur le Curé, he looked *très comme il faut*, but not at all French."

"Mademoiselle called him a Russian. His name is Prince Borodino."

"Oh! Oh!!" Marietta prolonged the "Oh" and rolled her eyes up to the ceiling. "Un *Prince russe!* They were 'fameux gaillards' according to Madame la Marquise. I never saw one myself, Monsieur le Curé, for Madame la Marquise did not receive any of the gay world; and there is nothing gayer than a Prince russe."

"That confirms my suspicions, Marietta. What can such a man be doing here, buried in Brittany?"

"He is after Mademoiselle?" insinuated Marietta.

"That is just what I am afraid of. He may be an adventurer. Mademoiselle has become a great heiress, as you know, Marietta."

"He has a beautiful beard, of real gold!" murmured the old woman, tossing her white-capped head and smiling a toothless smile.

"Don't be a foolish woman at your age, Marietta! A gold beard may be worse than a blue-beard."

"That is very true, Monsieur le Curé," Marietta nodded, trying to look convinced.

The Curé pushed back his chair, and remarked before leaving the room:

"I wish Madame la Duchesse may arrive soon. That English mother is worse than nobody as a guardian! I only mean to say, Marietta, she is an English mother. Their ways are different," concluded the Curé discreetly.

"Oh, that one!" cried Marietta with a warning shake of the head, and lifting of hands, as she went off to her small kitchen to superintend the *pot-au-feu*.

As for Prince Borodino, he evidently meant to make hay at every favorable chance of fair weather. Never was a courtship more hurried, nor yet more tactful. He had his reasons for speed, but he was very watchful as to haste, knowing the danger of precipitation. Clare was impetuous and romantic, but, as the astute Sir Frederick Marston also had observed the year before, at Monte Carlo, she was very "level-headed." Prince Borodino was clever enough to calculate each step forward toward the goal.

## CHAPTER XIV

### I

AS they walked along the lane, stopping now and then when the conversation grew animated, Prince Borodino skilfully aroused Clare's quick sympathy by a description of his lonely childhood before he was sent to school. There was no local color, nor even any personal note as to his parents or teachers. The autobiography was only "introspective" which made it all the more poignant to Clare, who found herself pouring out her own soul as she never had revealed herself before, while also avoiding local color and personalities with regard to "Mamma" and her devious ways. Their young lives — hers and Prince Borodino's — appeared to have swift, impressionist touches of startling likeness, both in their temperaments and surroundings: two lonely little children, dreaming the same dreams. The Prince was wonderfully clever in drawing her out and in showing her the counterpart. He was bewildered by her beauty. There could be no doubt about his feelings: he was in dead earnest. His voice rang as true as hers. However he may have felt when he began his suit, he was a real lover now.

It was the first time in her life that Clare felt the glow of absolutely congenial companionship. She

and Jane Penfield had found points of sympathetic contact, and Jane had kindly tolerated Clare's romanticism. The latter, however, had always felt the briar-prick of the sharp and aggressive suffragette, far more poignant than a crumpled rose-leaf in the soft cushion of sympathy, whenever she had imparted to Jane her enthusiasm over knights-errant and troubadours. Now, for the first time in her life, Clare found sympathy, human kindness, humorous anecdotes with touches of vivid description, all poured out amid sunshine, the smell of blossoms and the song of birds in a lonely lane of Brittany. And by whom? A *living* knight-errant in this prosaic materialistic twentieth century, more eloquent than any troubadour.

Clare glanced upward and sidewise at the tall young man who bent his head to speak to her, and who, whenever they paused in their walk, sought her eyes, as though he would look into her very heart — and that heart began to beat faster, while a pleasant-burning blush trembled on her cheeks. It was a delightful sensation, only faintly foreshadowed when, in Jane Penfield's society, under the Druid oak, Clare had read aloud the most thrilling pages of "The Talisman"; but compared to *this*, the romance of Sir Walter was as moonlight unto sunlight!

They parted when just within sight of the château, by apparent mutual consent.

"And the reading this morning?" Clare asked.

Prince Borodino looked embarrassed.

"To tell the truth," he said, "there is something wrong with my car and I must mend it myself, for I am my own *mécanicien*. I shall be in a horrid mess, I fear, nearly all the morning. Would this afternoon, about three o'clock, do as well?"

Clare was sure that "Mamma" would be delighted. "You know it is so dull here," she added wistfully; "and of course you must stay to dinner, and you will sing!"

As she approached the gate alone, Clare was thinking: "When I know him a little better I shall ask him to shave his beard, and part his hair. Mamma *will* be surprised!"

To that lady's question, at breakfast, as to why she was a quarter of an hour late, Clare answered that the only thing that had "delayed" her was a talk with the Curé, which was literally true.

## II

The landlord of the Etoile stood at his open door. There came a faint tapping of a hammer from inside the neighboring garage.

"Why don't you repair the automobile of the Russian Prince? You did when he arrived from Paris."

These remarks were made to a sullen man in a chauffeur's cap, who was taking a morning glass at one of the little tables before the door.

"Because he has not paid me yet; and because to-



day is Sunday," answered the man in the cap. He had an impudent face and looked very sulky. He had a socialistic tendency and was spending the summer reluctantly in Brittany, as *mécanicien* to the Duc de Poitevin, whose château was in sight.

"I would not be so unamiable," said the inn-keeper. "He had not paid his week to me yet; in fact nobody has seen the color of his money, but that he must be rich one can see with half an eye. One has only to look at his clothes and his hands, and the automobile, eh? And besides, he is a *Prince russe!*"

"We think small beer of Princes in Paris, Russian or Prussian!" retorted the chauffeur; and he departed, warbling the "Marseillaise," with his hands in his pockets.

An extremely untidy Prince emerged from the garage at midday. He was not in a good humor.

"Confound Bertie Harding!" he muttered. "He *must* send me that hundred pounds! Everybody is beginning to look askance at me already. If that money he promised does not come to-morrow I may even be refused 'essence' for the car; I have not five francs left."

This cloud, however, soon passed away. Prince Borodino was by temperament an optimist.

An exquisite vision of elegance glided through the gate of the grey old château and swung round the circle to the front door at three o'clock precisely.

## CHAPTER XV.

### I

“**I** *THINK*,” said Lady Betty on Tuesday morning at the early breakfast, “that you would better go a little slowly with your new acquaintance. He is a very attractive young man; that I admit; but I mean to find out all about him in London before *I* go any further.”

“How and what do you mean by ‘find out,’ Mamma?”

“Why, about the fabulous estate in Russia, of course. One can *see* he is a gentleman. Personally there’s nothing wrong with him.”

“What does it matter then about his money? It is what he is, himself, that counts!”

“What nonsense you talk!”

Lady Betty bit a piece of toast almost viciously. “The foolishness of the young infuriates one. You certainly don’t want a fortune-hunting suitor, gentleman or no gentleman, dangling after you, my dear Clare, with your present prospects,—and I’m sure, as for myself, that you never knew me to encourage the attentions of any but the most solid and desirable persons, whenever I have thought that I

myself *might* possibly (for your sake) settle down somewhere in England."

"Please, Mamma, never contemplate so rash a thing again for *my* sake." Clare's eyes twinkled as she remembered some of the "possible" step-fathers. "Besides, you know, I may be 'off your hands' as you yourself have termed it, some day, now that I am grown up."

"What *do* you mean?" Lady Betty gasped. "Only ten days ago you declared you would never marry as long as you lived. You were almost a 'mourning bride.' You were glorifying the memory of Philip Marston!"

"After all," said Clare, in a musing tone, "I never saw him, and perhaps if I had, I should not have liked him. I did not take to Sir Frederick!"

Lady Betty jumped up from the table. "You'd better not be making a fool of yourself about this Borodino," she cried in a temper. "Flanchec tells me that there is more or less talk at the 'Etoile' about his not having paid his bill there; nor his washing account either."

"If you *will* listen to servants' chatter, Mamma!" Clare's cheeks were flaming.

"Flanchec is a most respectable person, Missy: and the Duchesse talks to him about *everything*."

Clare was obliged to admit the truth of this assertion. Flanchec and her ancient maid, Eulalie, were the Duchess's most intimate and confidential friends,

as often happened in the patriarchal Ancien Régime of which she was a survivor.

"At any rate," Clare protested, "Grand'mère's '*camaraderies*' with the peasants and her attendants are not the least like servants'-hall scandal and back-kitchen gossip."

"You are very saucy, Miss, and there is no scandal whatever about it," snapped her mother. "Flanchec's sister is the Prince's laundress. It is quite natural that he should have mentioned about the washing-bill. She is a widow with five children — so your Prince had better pay as he goes, especially if he really has come into a vast property in Russia."

As they walked out of Lady Betty's round boudoir together (where the early breakfast was always served), Clare said firmly,

"The Estate is in Russian *Poland*, Mamma, and I do not believe the claim has yet been granted."

Lady Betty stopped short: "You seem to have found out a good deal. In that case Bertie Harding has told a brazen lie! He wrote, as you must remember, that he lent Prince Borodino two thousand pounds; that he had to borrow the money on his *expectations* — (Philip Marston's will) — and Bertie Harding said the matter was all settled; that the Russian government had paid up."

"Nothing has been arranged yet. He *will* be rich some day, that I know. And, besides," added Clare

recklessly, "I don't care whether he has money or not!" She was quite defiant.

Lady Betty never had possessed, or been able to assume any maternal authority. She said not a word as they went down the wide stairway. Then she wheeled about in the stone-paved hall,—

"Who told you all this?"

"*He* did," said Clare. "He has come three times to church in the village; the first Sunday that he was here, and Thursday, which was Ascension Day, and day before yesterday — Sunday."

"And you never told me —"

"I certainly never intended to make any secret of it!"

"And he has been walking with you? How dared he?"

"He has; why not? You let me walk all over Monte Carlo, Mamma, with the Comte d'Indigné and the Viscomte de Grandville and that horrid little Greek-French banker, Bartolazzi."

Lady Betty stood still.

"Just you wait, Miss, until Grand'mère comes next Sunday night! I wash my hands of you. I am off to London Monday morning for two weeks, perhaps longer; I only beg you *not* to be a fool!"

"There is no fear of that, Mamma, dear; don't worry about me!" Clare kissed her mother's unwilling cheek. "Prince Borodino will be here at

eleven," she said, with a gleam of mischief in her eye.

"I wish he would stay away — at least until I find out all about him. Of course you understand, Clare, that I don't want to be rude to the Prince; *personally*, he certainly is quite fascinating; what one used to call a 'lurid charmer'; but, my dear child," and Lady Betty tried to look maternal, and failed, "you must not commit yourself in any way, and when I explain things to Grand'mère, *she* will look out for you, never fear!"

With this final threat, Lady Betty disappeared into a small salon under the landing of the staircase, between the big front hall and the drawing-room, where she attended to her correspondence.

She sat down to write a very definite letter to Bertie Harding, telling of her expected visit to London the next week, and demanding that he should be sure not to leave for Paris before her arrival.

"You have got to explain a lot of things about your Prince Borodino which don't tally at all with the assertions in your letter. I don't say that he is not extremely entertaining, and a godsend in this dull hole. But that *fortune*, my dear Bertie, needs a lot of explaining — and I depend upon you."

## II

"Buried Alive" had been followed by two amus-

ing plays, and several poems. To-day the Prince began Chesterton's "The Ball and the Cross." Lady Scromer thought it "quite amusing," but it puzzled her.

"It is terribly queer,—that climbing down St. Paul's. Everything seems so topsy-turvy!"

Clare was delighted. Her quick wit followed every twist and turn of the grotesque fantasy, and the effort helped her to look quite unconscious of the Prince's adoration, which had grown very obvious, expressing itself in "meaning glances," which he cast over the edge of the book as he read, and across the table afterwards at breakfast.

While they were still occupied with that meal, a man on a bicycle sped past the window and crossed the bridge.

"A telegram," said Lady Betty, as Flanchec appeared a moment later.

She opened it, and then with a pleased and slightly derisive laugh, tossed the paper over to Clare.

"Grand'mère comes to-morrow afternoon," she said; "so I shall be off on Thursday morning early."

"I wonder why she is coming four days sooner than she wrote," said Clare.

"I fancy she is tired of Pougues," rejoined Lady Betty carelessly; but well she knew that some hints which she had thrown out in a letter with regard to Prince Borodino must have hastened the Duchess's

departure and made her eager to take charge of things at the château.

"You will like Grand'mère," said Clare confidently to Prince Borodino, who did not feel quite certain about it. Lady Betty laughed in her sleeve.

"Grand'mère (when *I've* had a chance to talk to her) will make short work of you as a suitor," she thought.

That afternoon, the Prince took both the ladies for a delightful spin in his car down to the Pointe du Raz.

"He certainly *is* a Prince Charming!" Lady Betty said that night to Clare. "If only one could be sure of those Estates in Russia!"



## CHAPTER XVI

### I

“**D**EAR SIR:—

“I am too busy to come to your office, and so I write to say that yesterday the gent went out in a hansom and I followed him.

“He drove straight to a jeweller’s shop in Old Bond Street, No. 185, and went in. I looked in the window, and could see him talk to an old gent, red-faced, with a white moustache, who came from behind a desk and shook hands with him. The gent held out a small red case, oblong, and the old gent took it, but did not open it, and the two retired into an inside room behind the shop.

“After a quarter of an hour, our gent came out, smiling to himself, and he gave the order to the hansom to drive to the London and Counties Bank. I kept my eye on him all day, but nothing of interest, except this, has occurred. The gent is preparing to leave for Paris, where, as you know, he has a place. He has been paying his bills. I also have found out that a Jewish money-lender (an old friend of mine) has refused twice to let him borrow two thousand pounds on his expectations, which cut him up a good deal. I expect you might find out

something at the jeweller's, sir. I am your respectfully,

“SAMUEL VEALY.”

Tom Skewton read this letter at his office, and he set off immediately in a cab for Old Bond Street.

Tom knew this shop and the people in it well, as did all the smart society of London.

“Good morning, Mr. Skewton; you are quite a stranger. There's not been a wedding for some time in your set, sir. Want to select a gift for the bride this morning? We've some charming little novelties.”

The elderly man with a red face and a white moustache, whom Vealy had noticed the day before, was always friendly and garrulous with the fashionable customers. Tom shook hands and thanked him. Then he said diffidently:

“The fact is, Mr. Wells, that I am looking to-day for something for *myself*. The truth is,” Tom blushed; he was not used to lying, “my dear father wants me to select a really fine wedding-gift from him to me! I may tell you in confidence (for the wedding is two months away) that I am engaged to Miss Hay — Miss Cynthia Hay!”

“Sir Lionel's daughter! Indeed, I do congratulate you, Mr. Skewton, most heartily. You will be brother-in-law to Viscount Bolton.”

Tom felt that Wells considered this an uplift for

him; that the "*Wiscount*" was to Wells a personage; but he only laughed and said, "You see my father wants to decorate me appropriately. Now what have you got in the way of pearl studs, really fine ones!"

Wells put his finger on his lips. He "rose" at once,—quicker than Tom had hoped.

"Come into our private room, sir," he whispered, and they retired together into the sanctum. It was a small room plainly furnished, but in a chest of innumerable small drawers, Wells kept morocco cases containing small ornaments, as well as unset jewels. In a large safe there lay concealed tiaras and necklaces worth a small kingdom, some of which had blazed in the radiance of extinct Empires.

But Tom Skewton thought of none of these things. His interest was centred on a little red morocco case in the hand of Wells, and he felt a passing throe of compunction,—but only transitory. He must follow up his clues!

"Now, Mr. Skewton, finer pearls than these do not exist, sir. There are four of them."

As he spoke Wells slowly opened the small case and displayed four lustrous pearls, wonderful in roundness, and of a size almost too large for the best masculine taste. Tom quivered, but not with admiration as Wells supposed. He was thinking of Foley's words,—"*There are four of them, although only three shows.*"

"Just take them to the light, Mr. Skewton. Let me show you also these sleeve-links, sir. They are on the same terms; beautiful star sapphires with a circle of diamonds; an antique gold setting wrought most artistically, sir; much too fine for sleeve-links. They would make an exquisite pair of earrings, Mr. Skewton, if the young lady wears them?"

"Was ever testimony more complete?" Tom asked himself when he left the shop, after assuring the delighted Wells that he would be *pleased* to consider the affair, if it could be arranged in six weeks time. "Wells can 'swear' to the pearls, and Foley to the sleeve-links! Good Lord! Who could believe in such infamy! And yet the criminal world reeks with cases as horrible as this!" Tom Skewton's thirst for justice and punishment grew upon him! "I must leave no stone unturned, and I must lose no time. We must not be hasty, but it ought not to take more than a week or two to get everything in shape, and then Vealy and I will be off like a shot (without giving notice to anyone). They shall be hunted down, before another living soul shall get wind of the case. I shall even keep away from Cynthia for the next ten days. God knows what may happen meantime!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### I

THE Duchess arrived on the Wednesday afternoon, as she had announced, and appeared in the salon ready for dinner punctually at seven o'clock; a massive figure, quite tall, and clad in black, which she had worn ever since Lord Sands' death. Her face was large and very white, without a pucker or a wrinkle on its serene expanse. She had a straight nose, with scarcely any indentation at the root,—quite a *real* Grecian nose. Her eyelids were usually half closed over two mild, round blue eyes, and there was not a visible shadow of either eyelash or eyebrow. Her hair was of an ashen blond, a mixture of flax and silver. There was very little of it, and what there was lay smooth and flat on either side of her face, with a wide, white parting between. A lace cap covered the absence of "back hair," and the scantiness of a small knot sustained on top of her head by one tortoise-shell hair-pin.

The Duchess was so blonde and smooth in tint and texture that her determination of character on certain questions came as a surprise after first acquaintance, although reminding one that a mattress

can resist a cannon-ball better than a stone wall. In what she considered minor matters, the Duchess was very gentle and yielding, her blue eyes always kind and guileless. She loved to speak English, and her utterances in that language were a source of unending amusement to her "step-family" and their friends, to whom she always spoke in English, which had been taught her by a Cockney nurse. This worthy widow, who took charge of her at the age of three, had so thoroughly grounded the high-bred little French girl in her own version of the English tongue that no subsequent efforts at correction could make any impression whatever.

"That is what my good English nurse taught to me," was the Duchess's inevitable explanation. Nothing could induce her to deviate a hair's-breadth from this early training. She clung to it as to a first love. It was bound up with the memories of her childhood.

"My poor 'usband, Lord Sands," the Duchess used to explain, "'e kept me in practice. 'E would always 'ave me speak English with 'im even up to the last hower of 'is life. I seen 'im laugh sometimes at my mistakes (for I know 'ow bad I speak), but it always gave 'im pleasure. So that is all right. I done all I could to make 'im 'appy, poor man; 'e was a *grand seigneur*, Lord Sands!"

The "intransigence" of this mild Duchess, and her solid and immutable obstinacy, appeared in a

still more striking manner when certain fixed principles were threatened, which to her meant the safety of civilization.

The Catholic Church came first and foremost: next, properly *arranged* marriages (a "mésalliance" of any sort being intolerable); and last but not least came the pure and extinct "Royalisme." She admitted no admixture of Orleanist dynasty. She could not forgive or overlook Philippe Egalité; but, worse still, in her opinion, was the Duchess's special *Bête noire*; "that base-born usurper, Napoleon Bonaparte." She would even tolerate a radical Republic "with all its infamous persecution" sooner than any prospect of a third Empire.

"If *that* could come to pass,—if I seen it coming—I should leave France forever, and go to live in England," the Duchess used to declare; and yet she loved the Château of Beaulieu better than any spot on earth. She had come to Brittany at eighteen, as the bride of the Duc de Beaulieu, and had spent forty summers there in peace and tranquillity; twenty of them as a widow. When the Duchesse de Beaulieu, at sixty years of age suddenly married old Lord Sands, aged seventy-five, her friends were utterly astounded. She was rich and he had only his pension. But the Duchess smiled her kind smile and explained:

"He is so lonely, poor Lord Sands; and he is such a *grand seigneur*. I fink" (the Duchess had

escaped any trouble with that stumbling-block "th" by substituting a simple "f") "I fink he would like a companion; and, who knows? He might be brought into our dear Church!"

She did make old Lord Sands very comfortable and contented, but he held out against all attempts at conversion, and had to be buried in his family vault near London two years later, according to the rites of Anglicanism.

The old Curé of Sainte Clothilde consoled the Duchess for this failure by reminding her of the "natural virtues" of the departed; and when Clare Tempest, who was the apple of her eye, was received into the Church at sixteen, four years afterwards, the Duchess felt amply rewarded, and thanked Providence for this crowning blessing. The summer following the death of Lord Sands (who had never been to Brittany during the two years of their marriage, preferring the *hôtel* in Paris) the Duchess returned to the château, and renewed, after this brief exile, all the associations and traditions of her "premières amours."

The Duc de Beaulieu had bequeathed to his wife the château and adjoining estates, and her one object and aim in life was to find a "parti" for Clare Tempest, who was to be her successor as châtelaine. This "consort" the Duchess used to declare, need not be a Frenchman; Clare herself was not French. But *Grand'mère* was determined that from every



point of view this suitor for Clare's hand must be a Chevalier Bayard, "sans peur et sans reproche." Any possible "mésalliance" for Clare was a perpetual nightmare to the Duchess, and Lady Betty's match-making attempts at Monte Carlo had filled her with dismay.

"But, ma chère Betty—a fortune, that is not everyfing! There must be *traditions*: rank! A title—I don't say, but *noblesse*,—Yes! Let it be French, or English if you will; an American, no—never! I would rather that Clare (my dear child) should die, or that she shall be an old maid (almost worse) than to have her make a *mésalliance*."

## II

"My poor little girl," said the Duchess, after dinner, as Clare sat on the sofa beside her. "I know just 'ow you feel. I make to you no reproaches about your answer to that poor young man, Philip Marston (son of my dear friend, Sir Frederick), although you know I urged your acceptance of his offer. Such a perfect alliance from every point of view; personality, family, position, wealth—everyfing! So charming a letter, too, it was that I opened,—so *restrained*! No foolish sentimentality (he had not seen you!) and so much filial piety."

"My dear *Belle-mère*," interposed Lady Betty, who held a newspaper in her hand, but who was within ear-shot, "we certainly did all *we* could.

Clare was absolutely pig-headed,—and now she has been quite broken-hearted after it is too late. Thank goodness, she has got the money anyway!”

“Bother the eternal *money!*” muttered Clare under her breath, burying her face in the Duchess’s pillowy black gauze bosom. Grand’mère kissed her, murmuring:

“Dear child! Money must not be despised!”

“The worst of this whole business is,” announced Lady Betty in a shrill voice, and spitefully, “that before next year we shall have a perfect swarm of adventurers bothering the life out of us. In fact the siege may be said to have begun.”

Both the Duchess and Clare sat up straight upon the sofa.

“Mamma, how *can* you?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the Duchess, suppressing Clare with a well-shaped and authoritative white hand. “Tell me about this man, Betty,—this Prince Borodino. What a name!”

“Nobody knows anything about him, I’ll wager; not even Bertie Harding, who introduced the Prince by letter to us. It is easy to see what the man himself is after.”

At this point Clare jumped up from the sofa and unceremoniously left the room.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**T**HE Duchess installed herself next morning with a sigh of satisfaction, in front of her embroidery-frame, which stood on an old carved table where the light of a sunny day shone through a pair of glass doors that were never opened. At this end of the salon, opposite the round tower dining-room, an unbroken expanse of wall was covered by an ancient tapestry, dull red, and gold and green. It represented the Queen of Sheba received by Solomon. The soft hand of time, and an occasional corruption of moths had toned it all down to a twilight key of harmony, so that the King in his glory and the Queen in golden raiment mixed and blended with the background of throne and curtained canopy, black slaves and attendant camels.

The furniture was more modern than the Flemish hangings. It consisted of a sofa and twelve armchairs carved and gilded, covered with canvas work "à petit point." They had been kept in repair for more than a hundred and fifty years as heirlooms from mother to daughter, in the Duchess's own family. The design was of faintly shaded rose garlands stitched in light mauve, both flowers and

leaves, upon a golden yellow ground. The renewals of seat and back and arms had been so cleverly copied from the originals that one could scarcely tell where the actual "*Époque Louis Quinze*" ended, and the reproductions began. The seats, of course, needed replacement more often than the backs. The Duchess was "creating" one at the present moment. This labor of filial piety was the summer work of a life-time and she loved it. It linked her with a past which was silent and sacred — so unlike the brazen noise and glare of an unhallowed present in the twentieth century. The Duchess remembered only the virtues of the old Monarchy, never the inevitable vices. Her memory was like the old tapestry behind her on the wall. Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were mingled in one celestial harmony of Wisdom and Beauty and Loyalty. The Duchess could no more have imagined picking out discordant human frailties in her Ancien Régime, than one would dream of reviving a memory of the transgressions of David, while repeating one of the Psalms.

She had the *culte* of the old Monarchy. Her Kings of France could do no wrong; or if they had displayed any human weaknesses, the enlightenment of a François Premier, the strength and courage of an Henri Quatre, and the splendour of the "*Roi Soleil*" — Louis XIV.— fully compensated for any imperfections common to mankind. The Duchess's

attitude was far different with regard to the "Corsican Usurper" and his Imperial successor, who, she always asserted, was no Bonaparte. Those two Emperors (*not* by Divine right) had been set upon a throne by the diabolic intervention of the Prince of Darkness bent upon the ruin of France. The Duchess never spared *them* — these monarchs of misrule. She shut her eyes to the benefits of the Code Napoléon; she was even glad of the rupture of his "Concordat," and flatly denied the commercial prosperity of the nation under Louis Napoleon during the Second Empire. She even read with a pleased and keen curiosity some recent scurrilous memoirs about the latter, of a kind which under ordinary circumstances — or if an attack upon the legitimate dynasty — the Duchess would not have touched with the tongs (but would have ordered a servant to place it in the very heart of the flaming brands in the fire-place).

The Duchess, we may add, was so ashamed of these hidden feasts — I had almost said debauches — of Royalist fervour, that such books as these memoirs were carefully concealed in a deep drawer of her writing-table, of which she always kept the key. The Duchess especially avoided having Lady Betty see these scandalous records, because "*she* would not understand." Once her step-daughter on entering the room hastily, had beheld the Duchess, in some confusion, put back a volume into

an open drawer, which she shut and locked. Lady Betty was highly delighted and made an inward comment: "Reading Zola or what-not on the sly; no better than the rest of us! Ha ha!!"

The Duchess, calmly unconscious of calumny, continued her investigations of the decadent Empire, furtively burying each volume in a trench near the woods, as soon as finished. She read slowly, and had very little time for furtive seclusion. There were still upon her list five chronicles and memoirs; and she had buried seven in the ditch during as many years.

This sustaining contumely, of a party out of power, helped the Duchess to endure the flagrant persecution of the Church under the Radical government. Besides, she knew that these outrages would bring down the wrath of God sooner or later.

"There must come a punishment," she would say; and sometimes the Duchess felt that the day of reckoning might be near at hand.

This year the elections had been very bad, and she had felt obliged to read several chapters about the iniquities of the second Empire, to try to counterbalance even remotely the scandals and crimes which disfigured the Republic,—but without success. Forgery, bribery, corruption in every form, and even murder, made the misdemeanors of any previous régime pale into insignificance. The Duchess decided to bury the book she held in her

hand within a few days, and even doubted if she would buy the remaining five.

She put the red-bound volume back into the open drawer, which she shut and locked, just as Clare Tempest entered the room from the garden, a radiant vision of girlhood.

"It is a glorious day, Grand'mère. It makes the whole world seem glad and gay. It is a joy to be alive!"

The Duchess leaned back from the embroidery, with needle in hand, and Clare kissed the soft still face, which seemed as if it never could have been young and tremulous with vitality like her own.

"Dear child, I am growing old," the Duchess said. "I ought to be finking of the time when I shall be here no longer. This seat," the Duchess surveyed her work, "will be done by September. The back is still good of that armchair. It is one of the two which my dear mother made. We done the sofa and the chairs all over in three generations: my grandmother and my mother and now me. It is the work of old age in our family." The Duchess shuddered: "The grandmother of my mother, *she* had no serene old age, the time when one 'makes one's soul' while stitching. She, with one of her daughters, was guillotined at forty years old, in the Place de la République. They were among the last victims of the Terror. Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! There was no serene old age of *broderie* for them!

I sometimes wonder, will there be even — at the last — for me? Or for you either, dear child? The world has grown so wicked.”

The Duchess stretched out a trembling hand, and clasped the slim cool hand of Clare, who now sat close to her. The excitement of the walk had subsided, and the girl was now a vision of calm beauty, like a quiet pool in a green forest.

“Dear child, promise me one thing! It is, that you, yourself, will not spoil your own life; that you will do nothing rash, while you are so young!”

Clare’s brow puckered. The stillness was broken by a ripple; the waters were troubled; there was a slight growl of distant thunder.

“I suppose Mamma has been talking!”

“Yes, and no. I mean, Betty (your mother) has said *fings*,— a good many fings; but I pay not much attention, as you know, to your Mamma’s opinions or prejudices.”

“This time, Grand’mère, it *is* pure prejudice.”

“We shall see. I should be very ’appy to fink so. Let us talk no more about it. I shall see ’im (your queer Prince) this morning for myself. I am glad your Mamma is gone away. I want to make my own opinion. And, Clare, dear; you will be guided by *me*?”

“I am not *sure*. It depends —” seeing the flicker of a frown upon the Duchess’s smooth brow, which might have looked severe had she possessed eye-



brows, Clare sprang to her feet, and kissed the perturbed forehead, saying,

"At all events Grand'mère, wait until you have seen Prince Borodino." She left the room, and the Duchess's eyes followed her.

"Poor child, she is *éprise*, and I fear with some adventurer, nobody knows who! How could that fool of a mother allow fings to go so far — and then afterwards to cackle so much about it as she did to me last night. Well, he will have *me* to face now, this Prince Borodino (Betty even admits it is a *borrowed* name — somefing foolish!). When he has me to deal with, it shall be a game with all the cards upon the table. *Nous verrons!*"

She was very glad that Lady Betty ("a foolish mother if ever there was one") had left by the early train that morning.

## CHAPTER XIX

LADY BETTY'S train arrived in Paris late in the afternoon and she "descended" at the Ritz with Farrington, her maid. She had decided to stop over a day or two in Paris, in order to make sure whether Bertie Harding had already left London and come to his new post.

"If the scamp is lying low and purposely avoiding me I shall know it, and I defy him not to tell me all the truth about Borodino, once I get hold of him!" She decided to take a good night's rest before doing anything. Between eleven and twelve next morning, Lady Betty in a plain black jacket and skirt, and closely veiled (to the silent amazement of Farrington) sallied forth from the Ritz and picked up in the Place Vendôme, a dingy *fiacre*, driven by a sleepy and alcoholic old *cocher*.

"They shan't recognize me at the Embassy," she said to herself, "I should be getting asked to dinners and teas and what not, and that is not what brings me to Paris this time."

Lady Scromer enjoyed immensely her air of mystery, as she leaned out and asked the old concierge at the British Embassy, in a feigned voice, if Monsieur 'Arding had arrived or if he were still in Lon-

don. She found herself eyed with marked disapproval (as well as her equipage) by the faithful Cerberus, who had held this function under two preceding Ambassadors: her own father, Lord Sands, and Bertie Harding's father. "If Alexandre only knew!" Lady Betty tittered behind her veil as she asked the question a second time.

"Pas encore arrivé!" replied the old man brusquely, turning his back and not even touching his cap.

"I wonder if Alexandre is lying," thought Lady Betty as she jolted along the street, the shabby old *cocher* threading his way with marvellous dexterity through the multitude of flying and snorting motors, on their way back to the Ritz. "Poor old Alexandre. He thought I was an improper character, but after all, he must have been telling the truth. What shall I do next?"

After breakfasting in her own room, Lady Scromer summoned the director of the hotel, who knew her well, and to whom she had confided the night before her desire to be *incognita*, in order to avoid social entanglements.

"I want," she said, "to find out, positively, whether Mr. Herbert Harding has arrived at the British Embassy and, if not, when he is expected. I must see him on a matter of important business, and I do not wish to go to London if I might miss

him. Of course you will not mention that *I* want to know"—

"Nothing is easier, Madame," replied the director; "I can myself tell you that Mr. Harding spent two days here at the hotel last week, and engaged a new valet whom I recommended, and who awaits his arrival, I think next week, at an apartment which he has taken in the Avenue Hôche."

"Good gracious, why did not I ask you before, instead of rushing off on a wild-goose chase this morning? But I am always impetuous!" And Lady Betty told the director about what she called her *escapade* at the Embassy.

He smiled and bowed, but after he got outside, this worldly-wise person scratched his head and laughed.

"Is it possible that Milady has matrimonial designs on the young English gentleman? Usually it has been Milords of high rank or American millionaires for whom she has set her cap, and with whom she has lunched and dined so often in our restaurant. However the Lady Scromer becomes just a trifle *passée*, and this young English diplomat may soon be an Ambassador with his father to push him forward. What thinks *he* about it, I wonder?"

Word came to Lady Betty that evening, that Mr. Herbert Harding was expected in ten days, but that he had already quitted his apartment in London, and

was supposed to be taking a holiday in the country, his exact whereabouts unknown, but the Foreign Office was his address. Lady Betty decided: "I had better stay here and lie in wait for Bertie. I can't go scuttling about after him all over England. It looks as though he were avoiding me purposely, and I'll know the reason why. He can't escape me here." She determined meantime to go out to Versailles and "confide everything" to her dearest friend, the Comtesse de Grandcourt, a lady as gay and festive as herself, and also a widow. "We can make a lark of it," Lady Betty explained to herself, "which will be lots more fun than mewing myself up here."

Two very eager and excited ladies amused themselves at Versailles while awaiting the arrival in Paris of the new second Secretary of the British Embassy.

## CHAPTER XX

### I

“**I** WILL hunt him down!” cried Lady Betty in a rage when she received a note a few days later, from the director of the Ritz, informing “Madame la Comtesse de Scromer,” that the valet of Monsieur Harding had received orders not to expect his master before the end of the next week, or Monday of the week following. Only the Foreign Office was given as an address: the gentleman being still in the country.

“I’ll track him, never fear,” said the intrepid Lady Betty to her friend Adèle de Grandcourt.

“But, after all, my dear, what are you going to do with him?”

“Wring the truth out of him about his Russian friend.”

“But can one ‘wring’ truth out of a man, chérie?”

“I won’t answer for a Frenchman, Adèle. But take an Englishman like Bertie Harding, and a woman like *me*, and I think the truth is bound to come out.”

“Meantime, my love, this Prince, whom you suspect of being an impostor, is making ‘*la cour*’ to

your daughter, hein? Was it safe to leave her there with him?"

"Did not I tell you, Adèle, that the Duchess is in charge of her?"

Adèle de Grandcourt shrugged her slim shoulders.

"Betty my dear friend," she said with a mischievous glance, "do you really believe that what you call an up-to-date English girl can't hoodwink an old-fashioned French Grand'mère, accustomed only to the submissive *jeune fille*? The Duchess has never before had your grown-up daughter and an ardent suitor to deal with."

"You can't really call Clare 'up-to-date,' Adèle," remonstrated Lady Betty. "She is really an old-fashioned girl."

"Pooh!" retorted Adèle, "what sort of a governess did Clare have? She looked demure enough; but Clare, herself, told me with pride that Jane Penfield is a militant *Suffragette*!"

## II

At six o'clock that evening, Lady Betty arrived at Claridge's. A note awaited her from Lady Rushville.

"You dear thing," it said. "So glad you are coming to London at last. You'll find a slip inside with the number of my box at the Opera — a small and young party."

Urging Farrington to make haste, Lady Betty

swallowed a light supper in her bedroom, and was eager to be gone, having the idea that perhaps Bertie Harding might appear at the opera. She found herself at a little after eight o'clock seated quite alone in Lady Rushville's box, in a quiver of excitement as to what might happen next. Few people had arrived, except the unfashionable who care for music and like to hear the overture.

The boxes were almost untenanted. "It will be fun to see the people come in. I feel like a detective!" thought Lady Betty as she scanned the house through her opera-glass.

A quarter of an hour passed. She was so intent upon some people who had just entered a box on the opposite side, that she did not notice the click of a door, nor, a moment later, the entrance of a young couple who cast upon her back a glance of disappointment, having come so early in the hope of a tête-à-tête.

When Lady Betty turned about, conscious of their entrance, she beheld Tom Skewton and Cynthia Hay. "How nice!" she cried, throwing out a willowy arm to shake hands with each in turn.

Cynthia cast a terrified glance at Lady Betty.

"Where is Clare?" she asked.

"Clare, why she is in Brittany of course, with Grand'mère."

"And is B——?" Before Cynthia could get any farther, Tom Skewton pinched her arm hard.



"Ouch!" cried Cynthia.

Tom bent his head and whispered in her ear,

"I am sorry to inflict pain, but I implore you, don't bring Lady Scromer into the case in any way or shape."

"Ah, you two," said Lady Betty playfully, who had observed this byplay and misinterpreted its object. "I feel quite *de trop*, but don't mind me. Clare and I have already written our congratulations when you broke it to us."

At this moment the rest of the "small and young" party appeared, and at the end of the first act the hostess rustled in. "So glad to see everybody," she cried in a deep and resonant voice, "but, as always, *en retard*. Some people are born punctual: but I have been told that I even came into the world much later than I was expected. So tiresome, but what can one do about it?" and Lady Rushville subsided into a low chair on the right, squeezing the hand of Lady Betty who sat next her, and shaking a very young head of hair and smiling a flash of white porcelain at the rest of the party.

"How delightful," she murmured. "What are they singing?"

Look as she might at everything in the range of her vision, Lady Betty could catch no glimpse of her quarry. After the opera there was a little supper at the Ritz.

Tom Skewton sat next to Lady Betty. "I'm so

glad," she whispered. "I want to talk to you confidentially. Do you know why I am here in London?" Tom murmured, "I can't imagine any particular reason." "I'm hunting Bertie Harding!"

Tom's knife clattered on the plate. With an effort at self-control he faltered: "What for?"

"Because he sent to us that Russian friend of his, that man who dined with poor Philip Marston at the Savoy: the last person to see him alive. Well, Bertie wrote me that this Prince Borodino is very rich and in every way eligible." Lady Betty paused.

"Is he at the château?" asked Tom.

"Not exactly. He stops at the Etoile Inn at Quimper: but he spends nearly all his time at Beaulieu. I am not saying a word against him, mind. The Prince is most charming; sings delightfully, drives his car like an angel; is clever and well-bred, and all that."

"Well?" asked Tom.

"But you know, dear Mr. Skewton, a mother must know more than this."

"What is it you want to know?" asked Tom, sharply.

"About the vast estates in Russia, of course," responded Lady Betty.

"Good Lord!" muttered Tom Skewton under his breath.

As he had told Cynthia, the last person that he

would allow to have the faintest suspicion of "the case" would be so indiscreet a lady as Betty Scromer. It might as well be given to a ravenous public at once. On the very next Monday Tom Skewton had laid all his plans to arrive in Paris accompanied by Samuel Vealy. Beyond this, he had vaguely sketched their movements. They would probably set forth in a motor-car for Brittany on Tuesday with the requisite credentials, and, if necessary, a French agent. How much could he tell Lady Betty? He owed it to Clare Tempest to put her on her guard.

"What does Lady Clare think of the Prince?" he asked.

"Oh, she is perfectly delighted, especially with his singing. Clare has quite forgotten poor Philip Marston."

"But in three weeks —"

"A three weeks' acquaintance goes a long way in the country, you know. Of course, I don't mean there is anything serious. Besides, even if he is all right, I consider Prince Borodino too old for *Clare*." Lady Betty rolled her eyes and cast a roguish glance at him. Tom caught on; and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"How old should you call him?" he asked.

"Thirty-five if he is a day,— or more," said Lady Betty decidedly. "It is pretty hard to tell with such blond men. Bertie said he was his own age; but that

*can't* be true." Then Lady Betty leant sideways and put her hand on Tom's arm. "I do not mind telling you," she said, "that I think Clare would be quite willing to have her old mamma cut her out, if the Prince should turn out to be all we hope. You see Clare does not need to marry a fortune. She can choose where she likes, and I am sure she is quite heart whole, only a bit romantic. I left the Duchess to watch her and she will do *that* all right."

Tom Skewton bit his lips and his face grew hard. "What you tell me," he said, "makes it a duty on my part to betray just a portion of a professional secret. (Of course you will see that it goes no farther.) I have been making inquiries because I heard that Borodino had gone to Brittany, and because of my devotion to Philip Marston's memory."

"But what has Philip Marston to do with it?"

"As you know," answered Tom, "the Prince dined that last night with Philip Marston at the Savoy, and Bertie Harding was to have been there, but did not come. They were all going to talk over some business together. That is where Philip Marston came in—"

Their conversation was interrupted by the dispersing of the supper-party. Lady Betty quite aghast grasped Tom Skewton's hand, "You have not told me—"

Tom looked mysterious.

"I have said enough, dear Lady Scromer, to put

you on your guard. I beg of you to keep quiet and take no steps whatever for a week. Then I may promise you complete enlightenment."

"I think I've scared her into keeping quiet," said Tom afterwards to Cynthia, "and warned her at the same time. But good Lord, a mother like that almost deserves to marry Borodino herself, and find him out afterwards."

"Oh, don't say that Tom. That is too horrible!"

Lady Betty went home feeling what she called "flabbergasted." She determined to run down Bertie Harding all the same, and get the truth out of him. However, the next morning found her as hoarse as a crow, and for the rest of the week Lady Betty stayed in bed or reclined on a sofa, taking aspirin tablets by order of an amiable old medical man, the family physician.

"Just keep quiet, if you can, my dear," said her old friend playfully, "for five days, and I'll set you free — say on Monday."

### III

On the Saturday of this same week Tom Skewton called again upon the young woman (telegraph operator at the Savoy). She at first refused to recognize him; but Tom was wary and propitiatory this time.

"I came," he said, "to say that I want to do what I can to help the 'Votes for Women' movement. Would money or a speech be most helpful?"

The young woman was captured by the wiles of the rising barrister. She stooped down and slipped a large sheet of paper from under a heavy account-book on a low shelf.

"Put your name there!" she said with an engaging smile, "and write opposite what you please—a pound or two?"

Tom wrote his name, and "two pounds" without a second's hesitation; and he forthwith put down two sovereigns on the counter.

"'K you so much," said the young woman. "As to your speech, I will report your offer to Mrs. Spanker for our next open-air meeting. We mean to have one soon, if our tyrants don't interfere. And meantime—"

"I must be off," said Tom hastily; and then he added, "I only wish, in saying good-bye, to apologize for worrying you two weeks ago, about that evidence, you know, connected with the Marston suicide."

"I remember; but that is all right *now*, Mr. Skewton. A lot of men besides you bothered me so about me taking notice of gentlemen that come to the hotel, and asking about their beards! Why, I got perfectly sick of those beards, as you know; and I was that mad I did not care what I said when

I testified, I tell you frankly. But, Mr. Skewton, I *will* mention to you, now that you've been so friendly, what I do recollect, especially as you are so kind about the Cause. The man that sent that message did not *write* it here at all. He took it out of his waistcoat pocket, and handed it to me, written and addressed in capital letters, and in French, just as you saw it. And I can tell you one thing more, that has come back to me. The gentleman gave me the message with his ungloved right hand, and while I was counting the words, he rested it on the edge of the counter, and I noticed there was a ring on the third finger, unusual for a gentleman (as well as a gold one on his little finger), and that ring caught my eye, because it looked so queer. I never saw one like it. The stone was red, something like a seal, but instead of a monogram, or some kind of a crest or ornament, there was a mad bull treading on the tail of a rearing-up snake, cut clear into the stone. The electric light showed it plain, and I've got good eyesight. If that is any help to you, sir, I am sure you are welcome to it. Good-bye. I'll be there to hear you speak, if our open-air meeting comes off."

## CHAPTER XXI

A WEEK had passed since the Duchess's arrival. She was seated as usual at her embroidery-frame, and as usual was pouring out a serene monologue. Old Baptiste outside was shaving the already close-shorn lawn.

"Can anything be more diabolic than a stone deaf man with a grass-cutter? Since that machine came from Paris Baptiste is so in love with it, that he shaves the poor lawn daily,—as he ought to shave his bristly old face. He takes especial pleasure in trailing that fmg back and forth under my open window in the early morning. It scrapes my nerves like modern music. Perhaps some audacious maker of bad noises may bring a grass-cutter on the stage some day, with real turf; who knows? That would be called 'original'! No, no, my dear Clare; this modern world is so dreadful, it is no wonder that geniuses in art are no more born. They keep far outside of this crazy planet. They cannot any more find a welcome, should they come to us 'trailing clouds of glory'!"

"That is Wordsworth, Grand'mère!" said Clare, who was trying to sit still for an hour and sew, because she knew the Duchess liked it.



“It is the ‘Ode to Immortality.’ Perhaps, dear child, you thought I did not know it. Your Grandfather Sands liked to have me read to him when he was very ill, and I done it often: poetry of Tennyson and Wordsworth and that nice American with the funny name; Longfellow. I read them all, and your poor grandfather did enjoy it. He did not mind my English, which you and your mamma sometimes laugh at. It was taught to me (as I have often told you) when I was a very little child by my dear English nurse (not a governess, correct and fashionable). My poor ’usband, the Dook, spoke no English at all, so to ’im it made no matter wot I said. He supposed it to be faultless. But Lord Sands! Oh, I seen ’im laugh sometimes. But whenever I said: ‘Please correct me!’ he responded: ‘Not for worlds! It is delightful both to look at you and to hear you.’ So I was content, because I seen that ’e was!” The Duchess sighed, and selected a new shade of wool from a little heap beside her.

“Is that tawsome young man coming again to-day?” she asked abruptly.

“The Prince? I hope so! But, Grand’mère, he is not a bit tiresome; he is very clever!”

“I call ‘tawsome,’ somebody who one wishes to have go ever-so-far away. Perhaps I am wrong, but that is what my dear old nurse used to say to me: ‘You are tawsome, Mademoiselle Antoinette,’

when she wanted to get rid of me. I seen that strange Russian young man here only yesterday, and night before last he dined and he sang."

"Yes, Grand'mère, and you wiped your eyes (though you thought I did not see you) when he sang Beethoven's 'Adelaide' so beautifully."

"My dear child, I don't say it was not beautiful, *very* beautiful, his singing. I loved to listen to it. But, mon Dieu, dear child, have you not yet learned that music is 'eavenly? It is entirely apart from the humanity that makes it. You must separate the singer from the song,—the creation from the composer." The Duchess laughed. "Oh la la! What monsters I have heard making music like hangels. And sometimes, my dear, Time plays 'avoc with an 'ero of the grand opera. Poor Paul Salewsky! You have heard of him—a wonder, both to hear and to look at when he was young. Such a Faust! Such a Siegfried! Well, my dear, two or three years ago, I was to make a visit to Régine de Frisac near Trouville, and one day she made me go to an 'orse-race at Deauville. And during one of the pauses, a fat man waddled up to the stand to speak to Régine, and 'e looked just like a Bologna sausage,—also 'is face! It was red and blotchy. And, my dear, that was wot is left of Paul Salewsky, once an 'ero!"

"But Prince Borodino will *never* look like a

Bologna sausage, Grand'mère," protested Clare indignantly.

"Humph," grunted the Duchess, "he may look worse than that! Who can tell? Look at the great Wagner," pursued the Duchess, sticking to her point. "*There* was a Titanesque music—made by a Peeg! But we won't talk about that!" The Duchess broke off hastily, remembering her audience.

"All I *must* say, now, my dear, is; that for the rest of this week, this young Russian man, of whom we know nuffing wotever, shall not be asked to come again. We shall 'ave a little time, you and me, to drive about and see some of our friends!"

And so there came a sudden pause in the Prince's onward march; most unwelcome to the young man, who had done his very best to please the Duchess, and who wondered why she also had not been friendly, as Lady Betty (Clare's mother) had been. He had not foreseen any serious obstacle in "Grand'mère": in fact he had not thought about her at all, remembering that the Duchess was no relation whatever of Lady Betty and her daughter.

The Prince let three days go by, brooding over his difficulties, and racking his brain to evolve some way to see Clare Tempest again, and to continue his pursuit. For he had fully made up his mind to succeed in what he had undertaken. A letter came that day from Lady Betty: "Just arrived in Lon-

don; am going to the opera to-night. I mean to find Bertie Harding, and get everything out of him — or perish! Meantime be cautious with the Prince. He *may* be all right, but who knows? I mean to make sure that those Russian estates are not castles in the sky." This was written to the Duchess, who tore it thoughtfully to pieces, saying: "I shall watch!"

## CHAPTER XXII

**I**T was Sunday afternoon. Clare had driven to mass with the Duchess to the village church, as they invariably went, in the old coach, drawn by the fat horses that never got enough exercise. There was no Prince Borodino there, nor had there been since the Duchess's arrival. This was her second Sunday at the château.

Clare missed the Prince more sadly to-day, because she had not seen him for four long days, and wondered when he would come *uninvited*. As soon as luncheon was over, and the Duchess had retired for a siesta, and was safely ensconced upstairs for at least two hours (Clare hoped) she betook herself to her favorite seat; the wooden bench under the gnarled oaktree in the Druid woods.

Clare wished to be quite alone and to pour out her feelings to Jane Penfield. She had a good deal to tell, and although nobody could see her, she blushed as she bent over a portfolio on her knee, and wrote rapidly with a fountain pen: "Dear Jane:—

"The 'Hero,' about whom we used to speculate so often, has arrived, I *think!!* (Nobody but you must know this, of course; for I, myself, am not *quite* sure.) I told you all about Prince Borodino

in the beginning of his visit here; what we heard about him, what he looked like, and what he said. Since then he read aloud to us almost every morning, and one afternoon, before Mamma went away. He has only taken us for four delightful drives in his car as yet; but that is because it rained several times, and the car has also needed repairs, so that the first week he walked from Quimper and back. He thinks nothing of that. Twice he stayed to dinner, and sang divinely (I must write a separate letter about that!). Three times he came to early mass at the little Church. (I wrote you when he first arrived that he is a Catholic.) I have never seen any one so often (young man, I mean) nor had such long talks. Those horrid creatures that Mamma encouraged at Monte Carlo were loathsome. They made love to me the second time I ever saw them; so there never was a *third* time! They made love in a familiar sort of way and seemed to want to *paw* me, when we walked among the trees and bushes. One of them did kiss my hand before I could stop him. Ugh! how I hated them!! Now *he*, Prince Borodino, has never even said a word about love, and yet, he looks at me sometimes in a way that really goes to my heart. You know what I mean, Jane; it is just the way the Knight of the Leopard looked at Edith in *The Talisman*,—a sort of mute adoration. So, of course, I know very well how *he* feels; and moreover, I am

beginning to think I know how *I* feel. It came over me all of a sudden, when Mamma said taunting things to me before Grand'mère came; and also, afterwards, to her, on the eve of Mamma's departure. Simply because she has taken it into her head that the Prince has not got a heap of money (as Bertie Harding said he had), Mamma is quite furious, and declares she means to find out 'all about him' while she is in London. I am sure I would rather he should not be rich. What difference can *money* make — if people care for one another?

"Now, Jane, you may laugh if you like, but it seems curious that the one and only thing I do not like is his yellow beard,—and also his hair *en brosse*. I told Mamma about this the very first time he came, and I said that, when I should know him well enough, I would ask Prince Borodino to shave his beard and part his hair. I gave him a little hint about his hair the last time he was here, but I did not dare to suggest *shaving*. His eyes are very beautiful; so *true*. No one with eyes like his could tell a lie!"

At this point Clare gathered up a loose sheet of paper and concealed it and the portfolio very hastily (almost guiltily) under the big straw hat that lay on the bench beside her. She still held in her fingers the fountain pen, and she looked up in confusion at Prince Borodino, who stood smiling down upon her, not a yard away.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a slight lift of his Panama hat. "I thought you would have heard my footsteps."

"I was busy writing," Clare answered, in obvious embarrassment. "Did you not see Grand'mère as you came along? I thought she might have come into the garden. When the weather is so beautiful she often cuts short her siesta."

"I did not come that way," replied Prince Borodino. "I climbed the stone wall and came through the woods."

"But the deep ditch between the lane and the wall?"

"Oh, that is no barrier for me. I jumped across it. May I sit down?"

Clare lifted her straw hat and picked up the tell-tale letter, which she slipped into her portfolio.

The Prince then threw himself upon the ground at her feet, and began to speak fast but collectedly, like a man who has rehearsed beforehand just what he means to say.

"I came here to tell you that I must leave Quimper next week. The term of my congé expires on Wednesday, and I have some business of importance to attend to in Paris."

"Congé!" repeated Clare, whose face betrayed plainly her surprise and chagrin. "I thought you were to be here quite a long time."

"Has it seemed short?" there was a gleam in the



Prince's eye. Clare did not answer the question.

"*Congé* sounds as if you were in the Diplomatic service. That is not so?"

"Of course not. I could not be in any diplomatic service but Russia's."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Clare quickly. "I — I beg your pardon. I did not mean to touch upon that subject."

Prince Borodino winced.

"I am sorry I can't be more definite," he said, "than to tell you that I am obliged to go away next week." Then he added with a touch of bitterness, "Your *grand'mère* at any rate, will be glad. I can see plainly enough her marked dislike of myself. That is why I came to speak with you in this way to-day,—and I shall go out also over the wall. I determined, Lady Clare, to try if I might find you alone here or in the arbour, and if so, to ask a question. I hope you will say 'Yes.'"

Clare trembled with apprehension. She looked like a startled fawn ready for flight. Prince Borodino smiled: he checked his too ardent wooing, and only pursued softly:

"Will you take that drive with *me* to-morrow, which we talked of last week, when your mother was still here, and she said: 'It will be delightful'? The plan was, to go in the car — if you remember — to Douarnenez, and, if the water should be smooth, to row and drift about in a boat near the shore un-

til sundown; and then to behold the marvellous light in the sky and on the sea, which is more wonderful than a Venetian sunset from Torcello. It is fresher and purer, with no haunting human memories. You said you had never seen the Bay except in broad daylight. I can bring you back in half an hour,—long before dark. Shall I call for you at about five o'clock? We can be back easily before seven, if you must be punctual for dinner. That will give us nearly an hour on the water, and thirty minutes for the drive each way; and if we miss the actual disappearance of the sun, we shall at all events have the golden light and the silver sea."

"But Mamma is not here," Clare faltered.

"Does that really make any difference to you?" asked the Prince, carelessly, rising to his feet and standing before her. "Did you not tell me that Lady Scromer allowed you to walk and drive at Monte Carlo without a chaperon?"

"Yes, but Grand'mère is very strict, and Mamma is not here."

"The Duchess is not really your grandmother," he pleaded, "and, besides, you are *almost* of age. May I not have this one glimpse of perfect happiness—less than two hours? It will be for me a day to be marked with the whitest stone, and I have had so many black days in my life. Remember, too, that I must be going away so soon. I may never see you again. Who knows?"

The Prince took off his Panama hat and bent his knee in supplication; and Clare noticed for the first time that his hair was parted on the side and brushed quite smooth like an Englishman's. He had taken her hint.

"Oh!" cried Clare, in pleasant surprise.

Prince Borodino smiled. "I hope you are kind enough to approve?" he asked.

"But I did not mean—" faltered Clare, blushing and in a tremor of charming confusion.

"A hint is quite enough, Mademoiselle. You did say (if you recall it) that hair *'en brosse'* always reminded you of waiters at a Paris restaurant. Now you see," and Prince Borodino laughed, "I would not even faintly suggest to you a *garçon de café!*"

"I am very pleased," faltered the young girl.

"Then you *will* go to-morrow?" the Prince pleaded; and Clare, remembering how unjust Grand'mère and Lady Betty had been, came to a sudden determination to "declare independence," as Jane Penfield had so often told her it was a positive duty for her to do.

"I will go," she said, "provided Grand'mère does not make too much of a fuss."

"Why *tell* her?" asked the Prince. "There is surely no harm in your going with me. You are accustomed to English freedom. Why not meet me near the church, at the crossing of the highroad and

the lane? That is a mile nearer to Douarnenez. I shall be waiting there to-morrow at half-past four."

Clare was sorely tempted. She thought of Jane Penfield's frank and fearless declaration:

"A woman can never have true independence until she follows her own conscience and does what *she* thinks best!"

Clare also made up her mind to talk it over with the Curé *afterwards*. So she answered:

"I should like to go very much; and I want to see old Marietta, the Curé's housekeeper, to-morrow. I shall be at the cross-ways near the Curé's house at five o'clock or a little earlier."

Before Clare realized what he was about, Prince Borodino raised the hand which still held the fountain pen, to his lips, and kissed it. The action was the same, but the Hyperean Prince did not remotely suggest to Clare the advances of the Satyr at Monte Carlo! A moment later Prince Borodino's tall form was lost to sight in the dark depths of the Druid grove.

## CHAPTER XXIII

CLARE sat motionless on the bench for fully half an hour after the Prince's disappearance, with closed eyes and hands clasped idly upon the leather portfolio that rested on her knees. His coming and what he had said, and his departure seemed like a dream. She went over it all, noting how he looked, especially the improvement in his hair. When she remembered his remarks about that, Clare laughed aloud and opened her eyes:

“‘*Garçon de café*’ indeed!”

She shook her fountain pen and finished the interrupted letter to Jane Penfield.

“I shall tell her nothing about what has just happened,” Clare decided.

That same evening, after dinner, the Duchess, who had looked portentous, opened fire.

“I can’t bear that young man!” she declared frankly.

“Oh, Grand’mère! That is very unkind.”

“That is ’ow it is with me all the same, my dear. From the very first moment that I sot eyes upon ’im I did distrust ’im.”

“But he is very handsome and clever, and well-

bred. What can you have against Prince Borodino, Grand'mère?"

"First of all the *Borodino* — that 'borrowed plumage' name, supposed to conceal a high aristocracy. Pooh-pooh, my dear child! That is a *vieux jeu*" (The Duchess had got this expressive interjection from Lord Sands.)

"But Mr. Harding vouches for the Prince's family and position."

"I dare say; and who vouches, pray, for Bertie Harding's credibility? Don't I know Bertie, since he was in petticoats? The Dook spanked him once, I remember, at our *hôtel* in Paris. I don't remember what the child done. It 'appened in the garden where he used to come with his nurse to play. His father was at that time in the British Embassy as First Secretary. I believe the spanking was good for 'im, but 'e done follies since that time, many ones. It was only a year ago that Bertie Harding went off to America play-acting, with that poor young man, Sir Frederick Marston's son. Ah, my dear Clare, what a terrible thing — his death! *There* was some one for you, just what we all could wish; clever, a genius, and of fine family,—very different from this pinchbeck 'faux Polonais,' and so handsome."

"Grand'mère, you never saw Philip Marston!"

"But I seen his picture, my dear. Sir Frederick showed it to me when he was talking about 'im,

when 'e come to see me in Paris only four weeks before 'e died, poor man. In the photograph Philip Marston wore an 'at, but 'is face showed under it, and 'e 'ad a short beard, brown and pointed. With a ruff, 'e would 'ave looked like a *preux chevalier* of the old time, when Kings were Kings; and when the *Noblesse* were gay and witty and brilliant, not like your London 'smart set.'"

"But I don't like beards for young men, Grand'mère; only white ones."

"'Ow about 'im then,—this gay cavalier of *la Pologne russe?*" asked the Duchess, with a glance of withering scorn. "I never *seen* such a beard. It looks like Antoinette de Bassecour's wig,—and about the same color, too."

"You don't mean you think it's false or dyed?"

"Mon Dieu, why should it be? Those full beards, curled and brushed, they always look false. About this beard I don't care. But it is the man! I feel convinced that 'e is false; 'imself!"

The Duchess's sentence was impressive and final. Clare was glad to escape to her own room and solitude.

"It is wicked to be so uncharitable. It is not a bit like Grand'mère to abuse any one. She is so generous, and sometimes too tolerant, the Curé tells her, when she takes the part of some of his black sheep. She is most unjust to Prince Borodino, and I'm glad I told him I would go to-morrow; and Jane

Penfield will be glad, too, when I write to her next week all about to-morrow."

But that letter was never written!



## CHAPTER XXIV

“**M**R. HARDING is going to Paris on the noon boat, to-morrow, sir,” said Samuel Vealy. He had come to Tom Skewton’s chambers with the information.

“All right,” said Tom. “We ourselves shall take the night boat. There is no hurry now for us, Vealy. We are sure of ourselves and of the case. And I really must thank you for the very able manner in which you have worked it up. I could not possibly have succeeded so well and so soon without your help, even acting upon the information which you parted with on the first day.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Vealy gratefully, but with a glance which showed “a lively sense of favors to come.”

“Your two hundred pounds shall be forthcoming.” Tom’s keen eye had caught the glance. “Never fear.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Vealy again, this time with an air of satisfaction.

Then Vealy laughed.

“I almost forgot to tell you something funny,” he said.

“What is that?” asked Tom.

"*She* is going on the same boat, sir — the *lidy* you said was after him; the mother of Lady Clare Tempest, sir."

"By Jove!" cried Tom and then he burst out laughing. "I don't mind it a bit now. She does not know a thing that would arouse his suspicions. She will only harass him, and keep her eye on him, and it will make our task easier, when the time comes to scoop up Bertie Harding in Paris."

. . . . .

Lady Scromer and Farrington disposed themselves in a cabin, just as the noon boat was ready to start from Dover. Bertie Harding, who had gone at once on deck and who had not caught a glimpse of these two fellow-passengers on the train, was unconscious of the presence of a lady he would have gone a long way to avoid. He stamped about in a long overcoat, as the weather was dull and rainy, with an unpleasant sea of molten lead tumbling outside the jetty.

Something over an hour later, the passengers were scrambling down the plank at Calais. Bertie Harding, who had been smoking and had seen nobody, was startled as he set his foot upon French soil by the touch of a hand upon his arm, and still more, as he turned about, by the sound of a voice in his ear.

"Well, Bertie Harding!" cried Lady Betty. "I

have run you down at last, and I don't mean to let go of you."

"Good God!" cried Bertie Harding, looking frankly frightened.

"People would imagine, to hear you," cackled Lady Betty, playfully, "that you are an escaped murderer and that I have caught you. Come along! Come along with Sherlock Holmes!" and linking her arm in Bertie Harding's with a determined grip, Lady Scromer disappeared in triumph, followed by the serious Farrington, bearing the bags and wraps of an eccentric mistress whom she had served for years without ever displaying the slightest sense of humour.

Besides, Farrington was slightly deaf.

## CHAPTER XXV

**O**N the eastern coast of Brittany, this same Monday, the weather was perfect,—warm sunshine, no wind, and a deep blue sky with a few fleecy clouds moving slowly. Clare, dressed in white and wearing a wide straw hat, swathed in a gauzy veil, walked over to the Curé's house at four o'clock. During luncheon she had said to the Duchess,

"I am going to see Marietta this afternoon, Grand'mère, and then perhaps I may take a longer walk — maybe to Quimper."

Clare's conscience was decidedly not at ease, but she silenced it, saying to herself:

"Mamma would not mind, I am sure, and I am nearly of age."

The prospect of a great fortune had obviously impressed Clare, in spite of herself; and coupled with Jane Penfield's strenuous encouragement, made her "feel her oats," as Jane called it, and "show a proper spirit," which to Jane meant a militance that would brook no control, especially from minions of the law.

After a brief call upon Marietta, who was dropping a few onions into the soup-kettle in the kitchen,

Clare, quivering with excited anticipation, walked fast toward the corner of the highway, which lay out of view between high banks crowned with beeches, where the narrower lane traversed it, running to Audierne. As she neared the crossroads a preparatory snort of a concealed motor struck upon her ear; for the Prince had been watching, like a sentinel on duty, at the top of the bank; in full view of Marietta as she stood at the kitchen door after saying good-bye to Mademoiselle. Marietta nodded her wise old head many times under its close white cap, as she whisked back into the kitchen, obviously bent upon an important errand.

The drive to Douarnenez was thrilling, Clare thought, with the breeze of swift motion whipping her white veil against cheeks that glowed and tingled; while her eyes glanced at the wonderful creature beside her, a combination of refined elegance and of a latent force and power, who drove the car at high speed with the same apparently careless ease with which he played the piano accompaniment of a German song. He was certainly extraordinary, this Prince Borodino. The only change Clare fancied she might like, would be a trifle less of supercilious equanimity. She would like to see the strength and power take the upper hand, and behold her "hero" flash forth from the sheath of a modern worldling. She would like to see him in dead earnest; not merely sentimental and self-possessed.

They left the car on the roadside before coming to Douarnenez, and proceeded on foot through the narrow village streets, down to the more populous quay. Here Prince Borodino hired a small row-boat, and after saying "May I?" he took off his white flannel coat, and grasping the oars in his strong white hands, shot the boat forward with a few swift and skilful strokes. Clare sat in the bow in order to face the picturesque village houses and the wonderful Bay of Douarnenez, but she was quite conscious also of the broad shoulders and muscular arms that bent to the oars in her immediate foreground.

In twenty minutes more they had rowed across the ripples of the bay, and reached a perfectly quiet inlet, from which they could see the village roofs and the church spire standing out in purple and grey silhouettes against the yellowing sky. Beyond the expanse of molten silver sea, Clare could see at the horizon's edge the pale pink crags of Morgat.

Presently Prince Borodino stopped rowing, and left the oars in the locks, sticking out on either side of the boat. Swinging his legs over the seat he faced the young girl in the bow.

"I can't bear to turn my back any longer," he said with a smile; but his eyes were very serious and looked as if he had made up his mind to say something important. The girl in the bow sat silent, a little frightened to see her wish fulfilled; for

there could be no doubt that the Prince was "in dead earnest" at last, and meant that she should listen.

"Clare — Lady Clare — do you love me?" he cried, coming straight to the point.

"I — I do not know you!" faltered Clare amazed, and feeling rather helpless to defend herself against this impetuous courtship.

"You do know me!" exclaimed Prince Borodino, assuming a new and masterful manner, which became him well, and which, in spite of herself, Clare found dangerously attractive. In her heart, had she not really wished to see him like this; no longer a mere modern suitor, but a real lover, — one of the heroes of her dreams?

"You know *me*; *me* as I am. You know me in everything we ever have spoken of; every sympathy in music, in poetry, in faith! I have laid bare my whole heart and soul to you, for I love you, Clare, with my whole heart and soul. They belong to you, even though you may trample them under foot. What more *can* you know?" The Prince was melodramatic, and he was also quite out of breath at the end of this speech.

Clare sat still in the bow of the boat, spell-bound. This was indeed the real thing; a realization of all her dreams; nothing lacking, except a vague sense of the artificial in the Prince's tone. Perhaps it was his slight foreign accent. She stared like a fas-

minated bird into the ardent blue eyes that gazed steadily into hers. The Prince had shipped the oars, and the boat was drifting idly.

At last Clare, with a strong effort of her pride against the temptation to yield at once to her heart's desire, raised her head high, and gazing into the distant blue sky above the Prince's head, she tried to say in a matter-of-fact tone, although her voice was suspiciously tremulous:

"I know *you*, I think, in the way you mean. But you must remember also that I know absolutely nothing *about* you."

The young man's face darkened as though a cloud shadow had struck across it.

"*About* me!" he repeated bitterly. "That means, I take it, what most women would care for more than for myself, would they not? My name, my rank, and, more especially, my fortune? Lady Clare, is that what you wish to know *about* me?"

"Certainly *not* your fortune," cried Clare, indignant. "I should care more for you poor, than if you were ever so rich." At these words a look of triumph flamed in the Prince's eyes.

"Then you do care?"

"No man has ever been what you are to me — I mean I have never talked so much to any man —"

At these words Prince Borodino stretched out his arms impetuously, but Clare drew back.



"Oh, can't you understand," she cried, "the barrier that is between us two? For me, you have no name, no place on earth. You suddenly appear out of the unknown — like Lohengrin!"

Clare paused. She felt suddenly electrified by her own words, and she was amazed that this thought had not flashed into her heart and brain before. Lohengrin was a hero with a golden beard! She had only seen a counterfeit of him on the stage, in Paris,—a mature hero, very much compressed in his chain mail and shining breast-plate, and with bulging calves to his stout legs. So, of course, she had then thought only of the incomparable tenor voice. But before her now, in flesh and blood, was Lohengrin himself. This revelation gave a touch of ardor to her next words:

"Oh, can't you see that I trust you? That I believe in your sincerity? And yet all the mystery about your name,—everything that Bertie Harding has told us, these things make you yourself seem unreal to me."

"Lady Clare, listen well to what I have to say! Bertie Harding wrote to your mother about the tragic and awful circumstances which drove the Princess Borodino and her son as exiles from Russia."

"Please don't speak of that," pleaded Clare; "and do not for a moment imagine I am alluding to it, or that I would ever hold innocent children

responsible for any sin or crime of their parents."

"My father was no criminal!" rejoined the Prince, hotly.

"Oh, I am so glad, for your sake! He was falsely accused then?"

Prince Borodino buried his face in his hands. He seemed overcome with a grief too strong for words. Clare put out her hand and touched his crisp golden hair lightly. It looked so soft, and it was such a wonderful improvement, to part it on one side, and no longer to wear it *en brosse*.

"Thank you," murmured Prince Borodino, who felt the light touch of her hand, but took no mean advantage of her pity. Then he raised his head, and smiled:

"You are far kinder to me than I deserve," he said gently; "and yet my love demands more than my deserts; more than kindness! Let us land on the beach in this little cove, and then we can walk through that long grove of beeches to the car. The little boy whom you see over there walking toward us on the beach is coming to take back the boat; I've paid him to do it."

So all the Prince's plans had been laid beforehand!

The grove was soft and shadowy, with playful sunbeams dancing here and there. A glimpse seaward showed the exquisite opal tints of the bay, with the mermaid's caves and the sharp rocks of

Morgat, a quivering, jagged line in the dim distance. Had Lohengrin indeed just landed? and was that the great swan gliding away on the smooth sea and not a white-sailed fishing boat? "Leb' wohl, leb' wohl, mein lieber Schwan!" The music sounded softly in Clare's ears.

The Prince could sing Wagner, too. He had sung "Walter's Preis lied" one night for the Duchess, who had grudgingly admitted that he sang remarkably well. How long ago all this seemed! Would the Prince disappear next week, like Lohengrin, never to return into her life?

For five minutes they walked in silence along a narrow path among the trees, Prince Borodino following in Clare's footsteps, like a humble slave in attendance upon an Oriental Princess. Now they were nearing the skirt of the forest, and beyond its edge was a wide field of buckwheat white with blossoms. A path ran straight through it, to a gap in a stone wall, evidently arranged purposely to give access to the high-road beyond, where Clare could see the motor-car awaiting them.

At this moment the Prince took advantage of the fact that Clare's back was turned toward him to slip his hand through her left arm and softly bring her to a stand-still. She turned about, and when he saw the lingering look of love upon her glowing face and in her speaking eyes, Prince Borodino was

absolutely convinced of something he very much wished to know.

"You love me, Lady Clare!" This time it was an emphatic assertion, not a question. Before Clare could speak he hurried on:

"I swear to you that my name (when I can tell it to you) will satisfy even your Grand'mère; also my position. As to wealth—" he paused a moment. "I have been hard up very lately. Bertie Harding outstripped the truth (as I told you) when he spoke about that loan and the law-suit in Russia. But I swear to you (although, my dear, I believe you when you say that you care for me and not for my wealth) I expect before long to be as rich as any suitor you have had or may have, in France or in England. Now answer me! *Do you love me?*"

Clare's reply shone in her eyes, but her lips spoke never a word. With a sudden whisk of her skirt, she made a leap forward, freeing her arm from Prince Borodino's detaining hand, and flying like thistledown in a high wind, she was wafted through the blossoming field, and in three minutes more the amazed but still smiling suitor saw her fluttering white dress disappear through the gap in the grey stone wall by the roadside.

Clare never stopped to take breath until she reached the car, and scrambled into it. She was still panting when Prince Borodino, a faultless figure of

a gentleman, with a Panama hat and a golden beard that shimmered in the sun, advanced across the field and approached her. When he reached the car, he stopped. They looked at one another; and then they burst out laughing, gayly, like two children! The Prince was satisfied. He had established a secret understanding. He did not mean to follow it up just then. There was some risk in pressing a suit too hard with a girl like Clare. He had felt his ground carefully up to this time, and he had not made one single *faux pas*.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**O**N the way back from Douarnenez, Prince Borodino gave his entire attention to driving the car.

Clare's feelings were mixed. She felt grateful for his silence, and yet just a trifle piqued by it. After a little while she began to cast furtive glances at her absorbed companion; admiring his clear-cut profile, as the wind pressed back from his resolute chin, the golden beard to which she had once made objection, and wondering what he would look like with a silver helmet in place of the chauffeur's cap.

The excursion had certainly been a success from the Prince's point of view. They said good-bye at the corner of the lane where Clare had met him two hours before, after her visit to Marietta. When the Prince had backed the car and whirled it round in the other direction, he noticed in the distance a black figure standing near the church, and, as he approached, it deliberately descended into the road and raised a warning hand.

Prince Borodino slowed down. He recognized the Curé of the little village. A moment later the motor ceased to breathe. Its occupant wondered what the Curé could possibly want with him. He

was not left long in doubt. The Curé walked up close to the front wheel on the side where Prince Borodino sat. Then he spoke:

"If you are a Catholic, I appeal to your conscience. If you are not, may the Bon Dieu forgive you for lying, and bring you to repentance. In any case I have something to say to you, and you *shall* listen to me!"

The priest's stooping, awkward form straightened itself, and his rough hand was raised and pointed upward; the peasant face, with shrewd blue eyes, became transfigured.

"*Monsieur le Prince,*" he said simply, "*moi-même, je suis peu de chose: mais grand comme prêtre!*"

Prince Borodino looked steadily at the Curé. He seemed impressed, but uncertain how to answer.

"Why do you say this to me, *mon Père?*" he asked.

"Because, Monsieur le Prince, that young girl is my child; her soul belongs to me as her spiritual Father. It is I that taught her the faith in our dear Lord's Church. It is to me that she has written, during these four years, all her troubles, all her thoughts, when she is not here to come to me for confession and consolation. That is why I speak to you."

"But I don't see why —"

"In God's name," the Curé interposed; "you *shall*

see why, and you shall listen to what I say — and act upon it, too! In the world where Princes move, I do not know by personal observation what may be the fashions and ways of society, although from hearsay one learns of strange doings, even among those who (may God forgive them), call themselves Catholics! But here in Brittany, Monsieur le Prince, the priest watches over every lamb of his flock as the Good Shepherd would have him do, and I tell you, that to go out alone for three hours with a young man is not allowed by me, to any one of them. It is a *scandale!*”

It was the Prince's face that flushed, but he spoke politely.

“You should not speak like that of anything the Lady Clare may choose to do. I beg that you will not. In England young girls are permitted such independence.”

The good Curé was unmoved.

“England,” he said, “is a heretic country. Do not suppose that because I am only a *Curé de campagne* I do not read the newspapers, and know what goes on in the world. Socialism and moral corruption have done their work in England as in France. The conflagration is started. The fire has been lighted in France by the persecution of Religion. God is not mocked! The curse shall surely fall. *The wrath of God shall make the whole world tremble!*”



The priest stood there in the wilderness, and his voice was like the voice of John the Baptist, crying: "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" He seemed to have forgotten why he had stopped the elegant patrician in his chariot, but only for a moment. Coming a step nearer, he raised his hand. "I warn you, Monsieur le Prince, that all this must cease. It may be only a game for you, but for that child it is serious."

"Monsieur le Curé," the Prince's voice was harsh, "let me tell you that I hope to marry Lady Clare. I expect —"

"In that case," rejoined the Curé drily, "you must address yourself to Lady Scromer, or, in her absence, to Madame la Duchesse. It is the simplest thing in the world"—and the Curé shrugged his round shoulders.

Prince Borodino looked crest-fallen, his head bent low. Then, suddenly, he lifted it:

"May I go into the church?" he asked. "Will you hear my confession, Father?"

The Curé was startled, but his answer was firm.

"I will not hear your confession, Monsieur le Prince, because I distrust you, and it might be a sacrilege." He shuddered. "If you wish to tell me something, say what you desire to say here and now, in the open road. No one can hear you speak but myself, and I promise you to consider what you tell me as absolutely confidential. However," the Curé

concluded, "I myself shall take it for what I consider it to be worth."

The Prince reflected, and then:

"I can't do as you suggest," he replied with decision. "Mine is a strange tale, and you might not believe me."

The Curé nodded: "That is very possible, Monsieur le Prince. I shall go to the château to-morrow morning, and inform Madame la Duchesse of what has happened; I give you warning."

"Then you, a priest, refuse to hear my confession?"

For all answer the Curé turned his back and walked back to his humble thatch-roofed cottage. Marietta was shelling peas into a yellow bowl at the open door.

"Hein! Hein!" she whispered to the pods which she shook into a pail for the pig. "Monsieur le Curé has sent away the *Prince russe* with a flea in his ear, just like any common man."

It was Marietta who had seen "Mademoiselle Claire" depart in the motor after she had left the old woman in the kitchen, and Marietta in hot haste had informed Monsieur le Curé, who for nearly three hours had watched patiently by the roadside, reading his office and saying his rosary and meditating on life.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**T**HE Duchess had been talking a steady monologue for about half an hour, and as usual expressed her ideas freely. She sat in front of the embroidery frame, but her needle lay untouched in a pile of silk skeins upon which her shapely left hand rested, while with her right she gesticulated and emphasized her remarks. Clare Tempest sat in a chair on her Grand'mère's left, round the corner of the table. She had been feeling up to this moment like a culprit before the bar of justice; but unrepentant.

For the Duchess had been laying down the law, having been fortified by the Curé and his amazing information, imparted early in the morning. When Clare saw the good man leave the château, walking through the garden to let himself out by the small iron gate, she was upstairs at her window above the salon, and shrank back so that he might not see her should he look upward.

But the Curé did not lift his head, and his stooping shoulders, which always seemed to bear other people's burdens, were more bowed than ever as the old priest disappeared through the gateway, and

Clare saw him wipe his eyes furtively with a blue cotton handkerchief.

At sight of these silent tears Clare began to feel some compunction, but she stiffened and hardened herself half an hour later when she was summoned by the Duchess to appear in the salon. Here she found "Grand'mère" as Clare had never seen her, — displeased and rigid.

At the end of the hour taken up by the Duchess in an uncompromising discourse with regard to *mésalliances* in general, and a number of striking instances, historical and social, which were brought forward as horrid examples, the young girl sat quiet and determined. She had not heard a word that could undermine her faith in the hero of yesterday. Lohengrin was not in the least like any of these "roturier" suitors, nor was she herself like the fools who had smiled upon them. For the first time Clare began to feel that buoyant independence so strongly urged upon her by Jane Penfield as "Woman's prerogative." She realized also what Lady Betty had sometimes asserted (when the Duchess had frowned upon her motherly schemes for her daughter's "establishment"): "After all, Clare, the Duchess is not *really* your grandmother!" Even the memory of "Grand'mère's" great kindness and her efficacy as a defence against "Mamma" grew dim in Clare's heart and mind.

She had sat almost silent, only answering a ques-

tion here and there, in a manner unsatisfactory to the questioner. At last the Duchess, having finished the abstract treatment of her subject, suddenly tackled the concrete. Her manner, however, grew kinder. She turned her white face toward Clare with its two curtains of faded and silvered hair, brushed smoothly on either side of an unwrinkled brow, and the eyes unshaded by eyebrows or visible lashes and as blue as the painted eyes of a miniature, and Clare suddenly recalled her first impression of this emotionless and placid countenance, which never seemed to express by itself any human emotions whatever, either of pleasure or of pain. Clare's first comment had been, "Grand'mère does not *look* alive, even when her lips move. Her face is a waxen image of tranquillity."

Clare felt to-day that the Duchess was the *Ancien Régime* personified; the rule of that Monarchy which had permitted to its men a life of persiflage and brilliant vices, but had drawn one straight and invariable line for the conduct of its women: obedience, resignation, and unswerving faith. It was a system which had produced wives content to be neglected, losing all sense of self in love of their children and of the poor; merging all desires for worldly pleasures in a yearning for what is above and beyond the earth. These women even faced the guillotine with a tranquil smile. To Clare Tempest, however, thirsting for romance and the joy of liv-

ing, Grand'mère's passionless face looked, at this moment, like an inanimate mask; the semblance of death in life. Jane Penfield's ruthless suffragette riotings seemed alluring in comparison; for *they* proclaimed a victorious female world, progressive and unrestrained, full of romance (if you like it) and "votes for women" (if you don't). Liberty untrammelled everywhere, to do what and as one pleases! The "old order" enjoined patience, resignation, put family above self (as the Duchess had been preaching to-day): and its victory for women was far from the blare of trumpets,—at the end of a dreary road and over an open grave.

Clare's face was tremulous with young beauty and a passionate longing for the young enjoyment of life. Her blue eyes were sparkling with eager expectancy and her ears were alert for the echo of laughter and gay talk, audible within a paradise before whose gate she waited, and about which she had read in Shakespeare and Walter Scott; the paradise of love. Prince Borodino stood ready to open the gate. If he should cease to be the elusive Lohengrin, he might impersonate Siegfried, and sing the "Liebeslied."

"My child," said the Duchess, "you must see how wrong it was of you to go away as you did yesterday. The poor Curé is so shocked,—and no wonder. It is so bad an example to his own flock, which he has to catch hold of so tight,—these village girls and the sailor men. But never mind about that."

The Duchess interrupted herself hastily. "What I want to say to *you* is, that no matter what your mother may have permitted to you at Monte Carlo, you shall never, when you are with me, here at the château, nor in Paris, go anywhere or see any one, without consulting me. You never have before, dear child?" the Duchess became plaintively anxious.

"Certainly not, Grand'mère."

"And yet, you done it here — twice!"

"Twice?"

"The day-before-yesterday in the woods. You can't deny it if you would, for I *seen* him, alone with you, under the big oak-tree, sitting at your feet. Oh, my dear, don't suppose I was spying upon you. You could not think such a thing of me. I only was going through the garden to the deep ditch between the wheat-field and the woods,— at the corner near where the path crosses over from the garden, the path that leads to your bench." The Duchess grew prolix. It was from embarrassment.

"What could you be doing there, Grand'mère?" Clare could not help exclaiming. "I thought you had gone upstairs for your nap!"

"I was taking out a book that I wished to frow deep down into the ditch—a bad book. I have done this before. You see, my child," the Duchess seemed to want to make a clean breast of it, "I have been reading some memoirs of that 'Second

Empire' which I thought I *ought* to read, in order to see for myself that it was as bad in some ways, as this atrocious Republic of Freemasons. These memoirs are most indecent books!" The Duchess shuddered. "And I bury them, one at a time, whenever I have read them. You see, in summer, I could only *burn* things in the kitchen, and that would attract all the servants' eyes, and they would be wondering: 'What for is Madame burning fings?' And they would not understand. I told the good Curé about it: and he said:

" 'My daughter, you can read these books without sin or harm to yourself; but all the same, it is not good for you, and when you have done with these that you still have, it will not be necessary for your object to read no more of them.' So I buried the third volume day-before-yesterday in the ditch. I could not take my nap until I done it. It is then that I seen you — and I seen him!"

Clare had the year before heard Lady Betty say, one day when she was put out by the Duchess:

"Your proper Grand'mère, my dear, who would not let you read Shakespeare, consumes horrid French novels on the sly herself. I saw her hide one in a drawer one day when I happened to come in. *I call that French!*" The Duchess's innocent revelation about the wicked memoirs touched the girl's heart. Clare leaned across the corner of the table, and kissed the soft old hand, with its two wed-



ding-rings; the one of bondage to a careless lord, the other of platonic friendship for old Grandpapa Sands!

"Poor Grand'mère, she has never loved," thought Clare, as her eye caught the golden gleam.

"Dear child,—you will have nothing more to say to this strange nobody of a *Prince*,—for my sake, *n'est ce pas?*"

The Duchess felt hopeful; but Clare grew stiff again.

"You are most unfair to Prince Borodino, Grand'mère; one can *see* what he is."

"Clare, my poor child," the Duchess's voice sounded final. Although it never expressed anger, any more than her tranquil face, there were shades of expression in its monotone more compelling sometimes than the shrillest vociferation. "You *must* listen to me. I insist that you give up all acquaintance with this man; this *suitor*, if I am obliged to call him so."

"But I love him, Grand'mère, and why should I not marry a man whom I love?"

"And of whom you know nothing? I will tell you why; you *can't* think only of yourself in this life. Nobody can."

"But marriage is love, Grand'mère. It must be that, or it is horrible. It should be the companionship of two people who think and care only for one another. It is therefore altogether their own business."

"Companionship don't go a very long way in marriage, my dear!"

"It goes through life and through death —"

"Oh, yes, yes," smiled the Duchess wearily, "'and they were 'appy forever afterwards'; so end all of your fairy-tales and romantic novels, child. But in real life there come trials and disillusiones,— and, last of all,— fatal for women, my dear,— there comes age!"

Clare brought her chair closer, and took the Duchess's left hand in both of hers, rubbing her fingers lightly over the two gold rings.

"You were in love, were you not, Grand'mère, when you were young?"

"I was a big, white, stupid girl called Antoinette de Chaumont. My parents were not rich (I have told you this already often), and we lived in the country. Our family was very ancient and (I have told you that, too, often enough) my father and mother wished for me a noble alliance with a family rich enough to exact no 'dot.' They thought I was good-looking."

"You are beautiful now, Grand'mère."

"Oh, yes, and of a good age for romance, *hein?*" A faint shade of bitterness echoed in the tone of the tranquil voice, but the steady blue eyes never changed.

"But, Grand'mère, you did have your romance when you were young?"

"It was arranged that I should meet my future 'usband. He came to us in the country. We were *fiancés*. I thought, Clare, that there was nobody like him in the world. And yet you see, my child, the marriage was carefully arranged for me. It was just what it should be. That is the only foundation for 'appiness."

"All those things, it seems to me, Grand'mère, are not so important as that people should love each other. The rest does not really matter."

"Not matter, my dear child? Why, 'those things,' as you call them, are all that is left after love is gone! *They* endure for our life-time, and for the lives of others who may come after us!"

Suddenly there swept across Clare's mental vision a scene in the garden at Monte Carlo. She and her mother were seated on a bench. A lady much rouged and powdered,—old but active,—walked past them, leaving a trail of musky perfume. Behind her followed a younger woman, fat and good-natured, dressed in the extreme of the fashion and carrying a small black Pomeranian dog.

"There goes the old *Diva* and her daughter," Lady Betty had said. "Why, my dear, the younger one is *almost* a relation of ours."

"How can that be, Mamma?"

"Well, Clare, my dear, you are old enough to know about such things. The 'Diva's' daughter's father was the Duc de Beaulieu."

"Oh, Mamma!"

"Everybody knew all about it long years ago. They are both living now on what he left them when he died. The Duc de Beaulieu had what is called a '*double famille*,' although it was scarcely that, for the Duchess herself never had any children!"

Clare's eyes grew dim. The Duchess's soft monologue went on:

"One should always try, my dear child, to bear one's troubles serenely; trusting in God. That is what the Church teaches us. We have only to think of our Lord and of His blessed Mother: 'He was despised and rejected of men'; and 'Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!'

"It is a good thing, dear child, to say just these two sentences to ourselves often. They helped me long ago, and they help me now, in my peaceful old age. When I look at the modern world that despises Him and the God that sent Him (and that would have the Mother of God to be only a common girl), it seems as if such blasphemies must surely bring down the wrath of God upon men, and the pity always is that the innocent too shall suffer. But it is the way of the Cross. We all must have our *Calvaire* in this world!"

Clare's tears fell upon the hand she held. She wiped them away softly, and kissed the hand again. Then she bent her head low and clasped her own hands in her lap, as though in silent prayer. The

Duchess moved her chair sideways along the end of the table until the corner was no longer between them, and laid her right hand, ringless, upon the soft golden hair.

"I am nearly done," she said, and her voice was as tranquil as though she were telling an old story of an aunt or a grandmother long dead. The personal pronoun did not count.

"I had hoped so much to have children. I used to think that boys would be nice, but most of all I wanted a little girl, for I thought that girls one could feel *sure* about. They would not go away and forget, as sons do sometimes. I used to sit here, in this room, and look at these chairs, at all this *mobilier*. You may perhaps think it childish, but here in this old room these dead things are all as though they were alive to me. First comes the memory of my mother, who had lived also with them and had helped to keep them whole, and who died soon after my marriage and left them all to me. And the Dook, he let me have for my own this end of the salon, although he himself liked the bright new gold and damask of the salons in Paris better. (But he was not often here.) So I have sat here alone for years and years and dreamed of my mother and of my grandmother, and of the young great-grandmother who had made only half of that armchair to your right, when she was taken to the Luxembourg prison — and afterward to the Conciergerie and the

guillotine. And here in this room I used to pray to God for a little girl, who would either stay on here, or else would take with her the old *mobilier* to her new home, which should be worthy of such a heirloom. And the dear Curé, who has been my friend through all these years; he knew about my prayers and 'opes, when I was young enough to 'ope. But 'e said to me: 'Maybe, my daughter, the *Bon Dieu*, who knows best what is good for ourselves, He gives to you no child, because you have made yourself the mother of all the poor here about. It is a consecration to His service.' I have never told you all of this, dear child, before; only about the old chairs and how I love them."

Clare sat silent.

"Now I must finish," said the Duchess, "for already I have been talking nearly a hower and a 'alf." She glanced at the old watch lying in a faded watch-case on the table. "Years went by, my dear, and when I was an old woman I married your grandfather, Lord Sands, to take care of him. And then there came into my life a crowning blessing: the little child, his granddaughter. She was more beautiful than any child of my own could have been. It seemed that the *Bon Dieu* had quite expressly sent her to me, for her mother gave her up to me almost entirely.

"Then came your conversion, Clare, and the good Curé and I saw before us a beautiful vista of 'elp

for the poor when we should be laid in our graves. You were to be the *providence* of the people (who were our children) and of their descendants also. I planned to leave you the château, for it is mine; and, you might laugh, my dear,—but I have seen you sitting here in this chair, yourself a white-headed grandmother, mending one of the *fauteuils* and thinking of me.

“Perhaps all this will explain to you, why I was so 'appy when I opened poor Philip Marston's letter to you (Sir Frederick 'aving already spoken to me, poor man, and showed me 'is son's picture) and why with all my heart I wished you to marry Philip Marston, because 'e 'ad everything that I wished for in a 'usband for you. I felt more *sure* of this than 'ad 'e been a young Frenchman—and besides, you are yourself English. And *now*,—*now*,—this blow has fallen upon me. You wish to leave me for a nameless man. You will go God knows where. The poor old *mobilier* will be stuffed into an attic after I am gone. The moths will eat it. Strangers will come 'ere to the château, and the poor will be left unprotected.

“Do you wonder, Clare, that the Curé, poor man, was crying when 'e went out from the château this morning? Do you wonder that I feel old and desolate?

“Yet you say, such things as this are only the business of two young people, who indulge in what

you call romance? Ah, my dear child, is not such romance worse than the most poisonous *absinthe* in its effects on our own future and upon others? *Romance* never thinks of having children; *that* is coarse and common-place; only the superstitious Catholic Church watches out for such *terre à terre* eventualities of marriage! Remember, Clare, all these ideas of yours belong to the time when you were outside the Church, and with your poor crazy Jane Penfield, who has no religious faith at all.

"One's children *must* be thought of (even if God should give us none) in the midst of the illusions of a romantic marriage. Look about you in the modern world. See Romance stamped on and quite dead; see divorce take its place; see what becomes of the poor children!

"Now I 'ave done. As you 'ave declared: 'I shall soon be of age; I shall 'ave money; I can marry whom I please.'"

The Duchess sank back in her chair, exhausted. She clasped her hands and shut her eyes. Clare looked at the still, white face, and saw two round tears escape from the closed lids and roll down the faded cheeks. It was more than she could bear. The Duchess had made Clare's heart bleed with pity and remorse.

"Grand'mère," she cried, sinking down upon her knees. "Grand'mère, I swear to you that I will give up all thought of marriage with Prince Boro-



dino, and that I will never speak to him again without your permission."

A white faced but determined girl walked in to Quimper that afternoon, avoiding the street where the Hotel de l'Etoile held out its signs of enticement for the tourist. She put a letter into the box at the post-office, saying to herself,

"He will get it early to-morrow morning."  
Then she walked straight back to the château.

Prince Borodino did get the letter at eight o'clock, as he was taking coffee and rolls upstairs in his room, next day:

"Dear Prince Borodino:

"I mean to be perfectly frank and final. I love you, but I shall not marry you; nor shall I speak to you again without Grand'mère's permission.

"Yours sincerely,

"CLARE TEMPEST."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

“**I** SHALL see her this morning,” said the un-  
baffled Prince, with a smile, as he put Clare’s  
missive into his note-book, and the note-book into a  
pocket “next his heart” as sentimental phraseology  
describes it, and really in contact with a very dia-  
phanous silk pocket-handkerchief, white with a blue  
border. The Prince wore white on this memorable  
morning, and his scarf was of mingled blue and  
white, with a pearl in the centre, large and lustrous,  
visible between the diaphanous wings of his softly  
floating beard.

All his belongings he packed away in a large  
valise, even putting the numerous toilet articles into  
a dressing-case contained in a smaller bag. The  
Prince locked them both and pocketed the keys. He  
evidently meditated a speedy departure, but he  
seemed neither anxious nor hurried, and he drew on  
in a leisurely manner the thick gloves of a chauffeur.  
Then he picked up his cap, and glancing at the mir-  
ror placed it on his head. Apparently not satisfied  
with his appearance, he determined to carry with  
him his picturesque white Panama. His plan was  
to leave the motor at the corner of the wall in the  
lane; then to leap the ditch, and climb over into the

Druid grove, as he had done once before. The day was dry, and he hoped his white flannels would escape unscathed. He *must* catch Clare Tempest alone. Upon this he was determined, if he had to lurk in the woods all day. When he reached the stone wall, he stopped his car, sprang lightly to the ground, and gained the underbrush on the other side of the deep ditch, over which he leaped without trouble. He had done it before, and, as he had told Clare, it was only an easy leap for an athlete. What was easy for him, however, would have been impossible for an ordinary and untrained mortal. The Prince was not only a gymnast, but in good form.

He had no sooner reached the concealment of a tangled mass of foliage near the old stone wall, than he heard a motor-horn, and perceived through the leaves that concealed him from view a motor-car, which swung round the corner of the high-road, and dashed up the lane. It slowed down, as soon as the two men on the back seat caught sight of the Prince's car, motionless by the road-side.

"Are you sure it was *him* just now, driving it?" asked one.

"Perfectly sure!" replied the other. "I saw his yellow beard glisten in the sun as he turned the corner."

Prince Borodino raised his head, and sniffed the air like a stag scenting the pack.

For he recognized Tom Skewton!

"What the devil does Tom Skewton want with me?" thought the Prince; and then an impulse seized upon him to get to the château before them. Of one thing he was determined. They should not catch him, whatever might be their object. The Prince strained his ears, but he could not hear what followed, for Tom Skewton had lowered his voice.

"Can you jump that ditch, Vealy, and climb the wall?"

"Indeed I can *not*, sir; neither one nor the other."

"You stay here then and guard the Prince's car, for he can't possibly get away without it. He may try getting a shelter in the château, but that will be a forlorn hope. No girl, even a fool, could cling to him in the face of such a charge — and I will answer for the Duchess. Nevertheless I would rather catch him first, and explain at the château afterwards! So I shall just race for the small gate that leads into the garden; you can see it from here. I'm a good runner. You stay where you are until I whistle (my watchman's alarm), and then you drive up in the car as fast as you can to the château, and get into the garden through that same side gate. I shall probably have caught him by that time and shall want your help. First of all, however, I am going to head him off!"

Prince Borodino crept stealthily along the wall, trying to make no noise of broken twigs or rustling leaves. A few minutes later he stood on the other

side of the wall, safe and sound, dusting his white flannel trousers. With his Panama hat and tanned leather shoes, the Prince did not look in the least like a hunted man.

Many thoughts and much perturbation raced through his active brain as he pushed his way amid the thick growth of grass and tangled branches, with here and there a fallen tree that had been let lie; for the Duchess did not allow the Druid woods to be invaded for fagots; only the path to the big oak tree was kept trimmed and smooth, and that ended at the wooden bench.

Prince Borodino was just coming through the last barrier of thicket, when a most unwelcome sight met his eyes, and he muttered through clenched teeth:

“What the devil is *he* doing here?”

Tom Skewton had run like a greyhound along the lane, not noticing an old priest walking in the same direction, and had whisked through the gate into the garden and along the path leading to the woods. The Prince beheld him now, seated on the wooden bench, getting his breath, and smiling the while, with his straw hat on his knee. Tom felt that he touched the goal, and his heart was glad. He could not see Prince Borodino, but he felt sure he was lying low somewhere in the grove. Tom almost winked, as he glanced at the thicket, and murmured to himself:

“You are trapped, you scoundrel! You can’t come forward, because of me, and you can’t go back

because of Vealy. Let's see what you will do next."

Tom Skewton had not long to wait. There was a sudden crash of crushed bushes, and, before he could get his wits together or even rise from the bench, the Prince sped past him, running like the wind. But Tom's sangfroid did not desert him, even now. He was so sure of his quarry, that he could do the rest of his work decently and in proper order. If Prince Borodino should attempt flight, Tom Skewton was sure to catch him sooner or later. If he should dare to brazen it out at the château, so much the worse for him and better for Tom, for Vealy had a warrant to arrest Prince Borodino (and a like one for Bertie Harding) on a charge of Murder!

When the Prince's flying footsteps slowed down on the garden path, Tom saw him take off his hat to the Curé who was slowly approaching the door of the salon. The old Priest drew back, putting his hands behind him.

"Aha!" said Tom Skewton to himself; "the old Curé seems to have found him out in some way not to the Prince's credit. He looks uncompromising enough."

Prince Borodino seemed bent upon entering the château, and the Curé, with evident reluctance, opened the glass door. The two disappeared together and it closed behind them. The psychic moment had arrived.

Tom Skewton's heart thumped hard against his ribs, and the blood sang in his ears, as he raised to his lips a watchman's whistle and blew a shrill blast. This was the signal for which Vealy, no less excited than Tom, was anxiously waiting. At the first note, the chauffeur (who was really a detective from the Paris Préfecture) put on full speed, and the car a few seconds later stood panting in the lane before the bridge that led to the château. In another instant, Samuel Vealy had joined Tom Skewton in the garden.

"He is in the salon," whispered Tom. "He gave me the slip in the woods. He ran like the wind. The old Curé was in the garden, and they both entered the château. The Duchess must be there, and Lady Clare, too. We can take our time now. After we have got our breath, we will walk up quietly; enter that same glass door, which opens into the big salon (I have been here before, you know), and we shall pounce upon him there in the presence of the assembled company."

As Tom spoke, a rapidly approaching sound, like the buzz of a giant hornet, smote upon his ear; and he and his companion remained for some seconds rooted to the spot, craning their necks and listening. The sight of a large limousine, however, dashing along the lane a moment later, startled them both into swift motion. Tom dragged Vealy behind the

rose arbour, and they each spied through flowery loop-holes upon the new arrival.

With a whiz and a hoot the big car slid smoothly over the bridge and drew up at the front door, panting. Out of it descended Bertie Harding, gallantly assisting to alight no less a person than Lady Betty. Tom Skewton gripped Vealy's arm until he winced.

"By Jove!" Tom cried. "What luck! We shan't have to stop over in Paris. We'll bag the two of them, here and now! Come along, Vealy; we've no time to lose."



## CHAPTER XXIX

**W**HEN Lady Betty and Bertie Harding entered the château, the first person they saw, behind the sturdy figure of Flanchec at the door, and the clumsy footman who precipitated himself past them to grasp the baggage, was Clare, who seemed more surprised than pleased at sight of her mother. She was half way downstairs, going two steps at a time, and sliding her hand along the smooth banisters, which she used to do as a little girl. Her heart was filled with exultation. For she, too, had observed from her window the arrival of Prince Borodino and the Curé, and she had seen them enter the *salon*. What was going to happen? What *would* Grand'mère say?

The Duchess had sent for Clare; her maid Eulalie brought the message: "Mademoiselle is to go down at once to the *salon*." This accounted for Clare's method of descent. Her heart was in her mouth, and her brain on fire. Had the Prince come to explain? What matter if he *was* a Russian, provided he could prove that Bertie Harding had told the truth about him, and satisfy Grand'mère, as he had seemed to satisfy the Curé; at least they had entered together. One thing Clare was determined

upon. Nothing could shake her. She would stand by her Prince, because she loved him!

"Well, darling, have you no welcome for me? Bertie has been telling me all about the Prince. We slipped down from Paris to surprise you in Bertie's car. Are not you glad?" Lady Betty bleated.

Clare kissed her mother perfunctorily, paying no heed at all to her words, and hastened to greet Bertie Harding.

"Oh, Mr. Harding," she cried. "Come into the *salon* with me at *once!* You must help him!" And Clare impetuously hustled them both into the salon, accoutred as they were.

What these three beheld on entering the salon filled them with amazement. The Duchess's face shone like a radiant silver full moon, and the Curé's like the red harvest moon just risen, a little widened by refraction. They were both seated on the sofa. Prince Borodino had his back turned, and his face was hidden in his hands. He could not have been weeping, for when he raised his head, a smile was on his face. He seemed triumphant; and rose to meet the new-comers. Then suddenly the Prince stood still, and raising his tinted eye-glass, he fixed it firmly upon his nose, and stared steadily in apparent amazement at two men, who, without knocking, had opened the glass doors, and were entering the *salon* from the garden without any ceremony whatever.

In the doorway stood a third man, obviously a chauffeur.

The Duchess got up and came forward with her "*grand air*." "What does this mean?" she asked in English, for she saw that they were English; and then:

"Why Mr. Thomas Skewton *filis*; can it be you?" she asked.

"It is I, Duchess," answered Tom, "and I hope you will pardon me, but this matter is too grave for the ordinary rules of politeness. I have come here on a very important and most unpleasant errand, and we must do our duty!"

"Our dooty!" echoed Vealy, taking a paper from his pocket.

"Does this matter concern *me*?" asked Prince Borodino, advancing toward Tom, his yellow eyeglass gleaming, and with an air of supercilious politeness. "I think I have seen you, Mr. Skewton, at the Savoy Hotel after dinner one night. I was with poor Mr. Marston," he added.

"I have no time to waste," broke in Tom Skewton; and he laid a hand, not kindly, upon the Prince's arm.

"Hold on!" cried the latter starting back.

"You may bet I *mean* to hold on!" retorted Tom Skewton, grasping Prince Borodino's right arm with both his hands; "Let me tell you why. I have a warrant for your arrest, Prince Borodino."

"On what charge?"

"For the murder of Philip Marston!"

Clare Tempest shrieked and caught at a chair to keep from falling. The Prince struggled to free himself. Bertie Harding cried out, and made a rush forward, but he himself was promptly seized by Samuel Vealy.

"Look out, Mr. Harding! I have a warrant here for your arrest, sir, on the same charge,—or of aiding and abetting."

Bertie turned purple in the face, and seemed on the point of exploding in invectives.

"What the devil—" was all he could say.

Suddenly Prince Borodino broke loose from Tom Skewton's grasp, and in the twinkling of an eye, his hands went up to his face. A moment later the *barbe d'or* hung from his right hand, as limp as the golden fleece itself; and facing Tom Skewton, he said in a quiet voice:

"For whose murder did you say, Tom?"

"Good God!" gasped Tom Skewton.

Samuel Vealy interfered. Loosing his hold of Bertie, and coming swiftly behind the Prince, he laid a clutching hand upon his shoulder. "Beard or no beard, you've got to come with us, sir, the both of you!"

"Oh, Lord, Vealy, what an ass you are!" blurted out Bertie Harding, "if you don't recognize *him* without any beard, let me tell you that this gentleman is Philip Marston, Esq., deceased!"

Turning to Tom Skewton, Bertie continued: "I ran down from Paris with Lady Scromer as far as Vannes last night, and over here this morning at her request. I had promised 'Prince Borodino' to help him all I could about Lady Clare, and I gave him just four weeks to see how he could get on with his audacious scheme. The time is up to-day. Lady Scromer caught me at Calais and wormed it all out of me. She brought me here, but I should have come down anyway to explain everything."

While Bertie Harding spoke, Samuel Vealy disappeared noiselessly through the glass door, and no one noticed his departure. A moment later the motor that had brought him and Tom Skewton set off for Paris, leaving Tom stranded.

The Duchess folded Clare in her arms.

"I *seen* him before you came in," she said. "He done it for me and the Curé, and he told us all about himself, and his wonderful plan, and then we sent for you!"

"I knew it! I *knew* it!" shrieked Lady Betty wildly. "I did 'worm it' out of Bertie, when I ran him down at Calais, and frightened him so, that he told me all; and we rushed down here to see what was happening. My dear child!" And Lady Betty tried to throw her lithe and willowy arms about Clare's neck, but Clare was otherwise occupied with Philip Marston. In fact he had his arm around her, in the face of everybody. So Lady Betty embraced

Bertie instead, who accepted the endearment diplomatically.

“And now!” she cried, “I must repair the ravages of our journey. I must try to beautify myself!” and with a roguish glance at Bertie, Lady Betty left the room.

## CHAPTER XXX

### I

**"I** can't be!" raved Tom Skewton quite beside himself and staring at the unmasked Prince. "You were the last person who saw Philip Marston alive! You were with him at the Savoy."

"It was *me*; it was *me*!" cried Bertie Harding, leaning back in his chair, kicking out his legs and beating the bare floor with his heels, in uncontrollable delight. "That was *my* idea. But for that you might have run Philip to earth at once and spoiled the whole game, and also but for me you could never have invented your ingenious murder theory,—so flattering, by the way, to me and the Prince. But we will forgive you, Tom (Lumsden who was so furious over our foolery will say it served us right)."

"But the *real* Prince Borodino?"

"Does not exist; never *did*!" shouted Bertie with another roar of laughter and beating of heels on the shining floor. "The get-up was Philip's in his best play, 'The False Grand-Duke.' His love-making and singing simply brought down the house in Chicago last December, in that most thrilling comedy. Once when Philip had the grippe I tried it (I was his inadequate understudy). I *looked* all right

(with padded shoulders), but somehow I did not quite get on to the part (and the songs had to be left out). The newspapers let me off good-naturedly by saying I was too comic for serious love-making, though I tried hard. It was rather like the tolerance of the Wild West: 'Gentlemen are requested not to shoot at the pianist. He is doing his very best.' However, I brought it off all right at the Savoy; and I never suspected that anyone would notice that *I* sent that fatal wire after dinner. You see, Philip had put it in the Prince's waistcoat-pocket by mistake, and had marched out of the hotel ahead of me forgetting all about it. So I just gave the message to the young woman myself. I suppose you spotted that in your sleuth-hound tracking of the assassin — eh?"

Tom Skewton still felt much bitter mortification — as a detective (amateur) — mixed with the joy of this incredible *coup de théâtre*. Bertie's teasing stung him.

"What on earth," he asked, turning his back on Bertie and addressing Philip Marston, "induced you to get up such a preposterous farce off the stage?"

"There was no farce at all about it," Clare answered promptly for Philip. "I can't see, myself, how there could have been any other way! Mr. Marston wrote to me after my first letter, saying: 'Let me come to see you;' and I, who was feeling furious, wrote back: 'I shall never speak to you!



In my first letter I have already told you that should you come anywhere at all where I might happen to be, I should shut myself up in my room until you left, or until I could get away! I meant every word I said."

"So, it seemed to me," Philip put in, "that there was only one thing for me to do: that *I* must die,—and that after my demise another man must win Lady Clare, by making her love him for himself alone—without knowing anything at all *about* him!"

"And that," said Clare boldly, "Prince Borodino did; he *made* me love him. I could not help it. I told him so yesterday, even though I said I would never marry him. Nor shall I! The only thing I ever really disliked about him was his beard, and that was the one and only *false* thing. All the rest was true; was it not, Philip?"

Tom Skewton was captivated. His wounded *amour propre* was completely healed at sight of Clare's joy.

"I need not say how happy I am at the amazing solution of the mystery, nor how happy Cynthia will be!"

"A thousand thanks, old man," said Philip, smiting Tom Skewton on the shoulder. "After all, you know, your murder theory was a very clever and plausible invention, and not the first one to melt away in thin air. Your villain—Prince Boro-

dino — vanished because he never existed. You can't even retract the calumny and say 'Peace to his ashes!' For he has none. All that is left of him is this —" and Philip Marston held up the limp and inexpressive golden fleece.

Bertie Harding rose and crossed the salon to where the Duchess and the Curé still sat upon the historic sofa, smiling upon the assembled company. The Duchess had heard Bertie's explanation, but the Curé understood no English, so she had translated it.

"Please pardon, Madame," said Bertie in French, "my boisterous ill-manners, but the occasion seems to warrant some hilarity. The Duke once spanked me, as you may remember, to make me behave better, and I only wish he had done it oftener. I might have been a different man!"

"My dear Bertie," responded the Duchess, "we love you as you are, even when we sometimes disapprove. And to-day we are loving everybody in the whole round world."

## II

Bertie Harding and Tom Skewton retired together into a distant corner of the salon. Tom felt that he must have a fuller explanation of some of "the *facts* in the case."

"How about Lumsden and that trunk?" he asked.

Bertie Harding threw back his head, and shouted again with boisterous laughter:

"Oh, Lord! I see it all now!" he cried; "Old Lumsden was supposed to be an 'accessory after the fact.' This also accounts for your really rather compromising companion of a moment ago — who seems to have vanished. That same scoundrel of mine, Vealy, was dismissed for a flagrant act of eaves-dropping on the very day of the 'suicide' — but I meant to be rid of him anyway, for I guessed that he had had shady dealings with the police in Petersburg."

"But you have not explained the trunk!" Tom Skewton was chafing with impatience.

"I am coming to that, but it will take a few minutes;" Bertie turned his head. At the end of the salon the Duchess and the Curé were engaged in an ecstatic exclamatory tête-à-tête, while Clare and Philip Marston were lost to all consciousness but of each other — explaining and talking both at once. The golden beard had fluttered to the floor and lay there beside his chair — forgotten. Bertie resumed:

"Now is my time, Tom. I will clear up any doubts that may still remain in your detective mind,—although as you see," and Bertie waved his hand toward the young people, "'the report' of Philip's murder — as Mark Twain said of his own sudden death — 'has been greatly exaggerated!'"

"Don't rub it in! I want to know about that trunk!"

"My dear fellow, when we — Philip and I — got back to my room from the Savoy, I peeled off the Prince's paraphernalia, and Philip was about to slip into it. He had worn the whole outfit in America, and had brought it to my rooms in his Gladstone bag that afternoon (together with a new grey suit which he had never worn, and in which the Prince meant to clothe himself before returning to his hotel). Suddenly there was a pause. 'I forgot *my* beard,' cried Philip; 'it will show through that yellow thing. It has a peak in front — and the Prince's is parted in the middle!' 'Shave it off!' said I. Philip glared at me. 'With your infernal safety-razor, and at one o'clock in the morning!' he cried; and then 'You took that new dressing-case of mine to the Berkeley with you, I suppose?'

" 'I did,' said I, 'with three new shirts and three suits of pajamas,— not to mention socks and handkerchiefs, all unmarked, and packed in my old Gladstone bag, which is supposed to have crossed the Channel coming from Paris yesterday with Prince Borodino.'

" 'I must shave at the Berkeley then,' said Philip. 'I will tie a silk muffler around my neck. Nobody will notice me and my *beards* at this hour of the morning — and as the Prince is leaving the hotel immediately after an early breakfast, there will be no likelihood of anyone noticing how his nose has changed for the better.' "

"But about Lumsden?" cried Tom Skewton, beating his foot, impatiently, on the floor; "about Lumsden and the *trunk*?"

"I am taking things as they come," protested Bertie. "I am sure, Tom, you want to know about that coat and hat in the bush, don't you? Philip got ready in a few minutes, and he went off wearing the two beards (Lord, but it was funny) and carrying his own hat and overcoat concealed under a foreign-looking *pardessus* that I had got in Petersburg. I never saw a more dark and deadly conspirator even on the stage! Hold on a minute, Tom, I am coming to Lumsden now. We had told him all, of course, from the first embryonic dawn of our scheme, of which *I* was the initiator. Lumsden was in a furious rage; said we ought both to be sent to Hanwell. He was in a special frenzy, over the last will and testament, which Philip showed him. (The testator had drawn it up that morning, his hand shaking so with laughter that the writing was more like 'Philip drunk' than sober.)"

"I noticed *that*," said Tom grimly. "I think an expert would have been in doubt whether it was Philip Marston's handwriting at all."

"Good Lord! Were we supposed to have also forged the will?"

"And bribed the witnesses!"

"And this is how Justice takes its course! Behold! This is the judgment of a rising barrister!"

"It is not a barrister's business," put in Tom, sharply.

"No! It is his *distraction*, as we say in France!"

"Oh, *do* go on, Bertie!"

"Where was I? Oh, yes. Lumsden fretted and fumed, but he had to give in to Philip; *he* was dead set to try my scheme. He said his father had proposed that he should go to Brittany to 'make his court' (as the Duchess would have put it), and do it like a 'jeune premier'; and Philip said he could do this much better in one of his stage rôles. Besides, I think he was counting," Bertie lowered his voice, and glanced at the lovers, "upon a loop-hole of escape for Prince Borodino — *in case* the young lady were not — what she is! Any way, Lumsden consented at last, and we gave Philip four weeks for his mad escapade."

"But why the ridiculous will?"

"My dear Tom, we are not barristers. We were not cognizant of the law's delays — or else oblivious! We had an idea that I could put my hand at once in Philip's till and keep him supplied liberally with funds. He had only a hundred pounds in cash about him, and I was run dry, having just paid all my honest debts, before taking my new post in Paris. We stuck Lumsden's name into the will, because it would have seemed too erratic if Philip had endowed *me* alone with the whole of his worldly goods.

That is what made old Lumsden so furious. Well, we granted Philip his four weeks, and then he was to come to life; and Borodino was to vanish into space — which has happened. The time is up to-day!

“Our plan was to be carried out as follows. Lumsden was to call bright and early (before my infernal servant should get back from Clapham), and take away the new trunk I had bought for the occasion the day before, in which I packed the Prince’s evening clothes, and a steamer rug and a few odds and ends.

“Lumsden took the trunk away in a four-wheeler to his house, where Prince Borodino himself arrived that same morning. (We drove there from your father’s office.) Well, the Prince stayed with old Lumsden a few days before he got off to Paris, where he stopped ten days and bought his beautiful outfit, a part of which you behold. And he spent, with that and his hotel bill, nearly the whole of his hundred pounds — the Prince is not an economist! I had to raise the wind for him here when he was dead broke at Quimper. Failing to raise a loan from an old Jew friend upon my ‘expectations,’ I shoved up his late father’s buttons and sleeve-links, which by the bye we must reclaim.”

“I know you did!”

“By Jove, Tom! You seem to know everything!”

"It was a very complete case, after all," asserted Tom Skewton, recovering his self-esteem.

"I dare say. Men have been *hanged* for less!" commented Bertie with a wry face.

"One thing more! That black smoke from Lumsden's laboratory?"

"Good Lord! Your case is now complete!" shouted Bertie Harding, kicking his heels again. Then striking a theatrical attitude: "Yet after all, 't is most damning evidence!" he cried; "for some of that smoke, let me tell you, Thomas, was the wraith of Philip Marston's beard! He carried the shavings off most carefully, wrapped in tissue-paper, from the Berkeley. What other ghosts may have hovered in the air above Lumsden's roof that morning is no business of ours. An anatomist has a right to dispose of lots of laboratory offscourings. He need not always keep them lying round loose, as Mr. Venus did. Do you remember, Tom (in "Our Mutual Friend"); 'There was two in the coffee-pot this morning — molars?'"

"Well, you dears!" This exclamation burst from Lady Betty, standing in the open doorway. She was arrayed in a drapery of white lace, her bare arms waving a la Delsarte: "It is just too wonderful! An Arabian Night's dream."

"It is better than that," declared the Duchess, "'e 'as dropped straight from 'eaven!"



The good Curé, who was looking on in silent rapture, not understanding a word of the conversation but fully enlightened as to the whole situation, now "made his compliments" to everybody and went back to his midday meal. He was a very different Curé from the dejected and offended priest who had come over that morning to admonish his "poor child."

"God bless them," he murmured as he passed through the iron gate. "God bless them — and their children, and their children's children."

THE END





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